

VOLUME FOURTEEN • NUMBER THREE • FALL 1993

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Jesuit Educational  
Center for Human Development

**Ethics for Spiritual Directors**



**A View of Female Spirituality**



**Intuition in Personal Development**



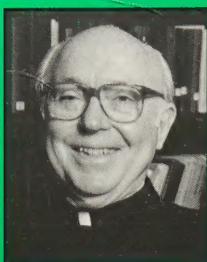
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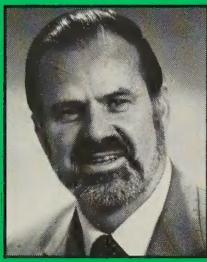
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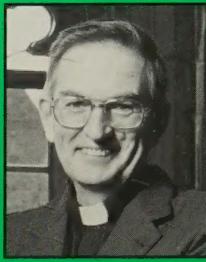
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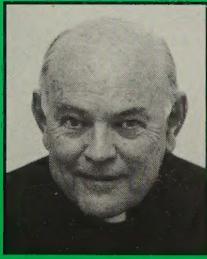
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Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews, which should not exceed 600 words in length, should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Jon O'Brien, S.J., D.O., Jesuit Community, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

## PREPARING FOR LIFE'S MISFORTUNES

**S**ummertime—the season that invites us to take a vacation, travel, and change the pace of our lives—usually leaves us with an array of happy memories to carry in our hearts into the autumn and winter ahead. But my own three most vivid memories of the too-brief summer just ending are focused on a single less-than-joyful theme: loss.

One of these memories is of the deluge in the Midwest, where incessant rains, swollen rivers, the inundation of cities and farmlands, and the destruction of billions of dollars' worth of homes and possessions ruined the joys and pleasures of summertime for hundreds of thousands of victims. Jerry Adler, writing in *Newsweek* magazine, declared that "the lesson of the disaster, which is the lesson of most disasters, is to never underestimate nature." I think there is an even more important lesson for all of us to learn from the shock, confusion, and sorrow that were delivered to the thresholds of our hearts in July and August, day after day, by the radio and television news programs that featured interviews with the flood victims. But I'll save that lesson for a little later.

The second tragic event I will remember from this summer occurred on a university basketball court near Boston. The 27-year-old captain of the Boston Celtics professional basketball team, Reggie Lewis, was just shooting baskets in an easygoing, pleasurable way—not in a game or against any competitor—when he suddenly fell to the floor, became unconscious, and soon died. In death he left behind a pregnant wife and a year-old son, along with countless friends and fans, including

20,000 who stood in line for hours to pay their final respects beside his casket at the largest funeral ever held in the city of Boston. For several days one radio station simply broadcasted the calls of people who wanted to express their sympathy to Reggie's bereaved family and teammates. What sentiment did most of the stunned and grief-stricken callers express? In effect, incomprehension. They made such comments as "Why should something like this happen to someone so young?" "What sense can you make out of a heartbreaking event like this?"

The third event I will remember when I think of this summer was a gloriously beautiful wedding at which I had the privilege of acting as priest-celebrant. The bride and groom were surrounded by beaming family members and friends, on the kind of sunny, blue-skied, cloudless day for which every altar-bound couple hopes. The two of them, following the practice governing Catholic weddings these days, personally selected the scriptural readings, prayers, and blessings that the ceremony would include. Wanting nothing to diminish their happiness, I was disposed to follow their wishes without question.

But when I became aware of the form of "declaration of consent" they chose, I immediately experienced a sense of loss—not *my* loss, but theirs. They asked me not to use the traditional form, "I . . . take you . . . to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." The couple told me that they didn't want to think, on their wedding day, about being sick or poor or dying. Such thoughts, they said, were "morose." So we used the declaration they composed: "I take you to be my own, promise to be true to you, and to love and honor you, all the days of my life." At the wedding, I'm sure, they had no idea what it was they were missing. I regret that I failed to tell them they were losing a chance to benefit from a piece of

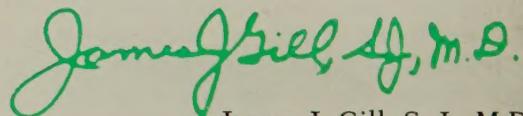
practical wisdom the church has valued and preserved over centuries—the truth that even in moments when we are experiencing our greatest joys we should, while being grateful to God for those joys, keep realistically in mind the fact that every complete human life contains a full spectrum of events and feelings, ranging from elation to grief, from vigor to illness, from possession to loss. This is the life that a couple approaching the altar together should be committing themselves to sharing until death—with love.

Failure to contemplate and accept the truth that God is as close to us and loves us as much during our dark hours as in our brightest ones often results in serious damage to the spiritual life of people who experience floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, marital difficulties, sickness, and the deaths of loved ones. The result is seen in the lives of people today who, like a number of the midwestern flood victims seen on television, say their losses of material goods make them doubt that God exists. Likewise, too many people who witness an early-life death, like Reggie Lewis's, falsely reason in their grief that no God who is good and loving could ever let such a terrible thing happen.

Those of us who are in a position to help shape the thinking of the young would do well, first of all, to examine our own beliefs about God, losses, suffering, and death—to discover whether our thinking is congruent with what God has disclosed through Revelation—and then to seize every available opportunity to assist the young in grasping the truth about natural events in relation to God. They need to learn from us, in advance of disasters, that

the earth's surface is built of vast plates that at times will shift and cause quakes; that rainfall varies from year to year and sometimes produces floods; that some children are born with defective hearts; that winds occasionally reach hurricane velocity; and that God's everyday way of demonstrating infinite love for us does not consist in suspending or interfering with the functioning of God-designed nature, which sciences like seismology, meteorology, and physiology describe. The young also need to learn from us that our losses are God's instruments for testing and strengthening our faith, our trust, and our courage to carry on.

The events of this summer taught me that we need to think and teach realistically about what God does and doesn't do. Through disasters God does lead people to value persons more and material things less. Through sudden deaths God does take even young persons to Heaven. Through the pains as well as the joys that marriage guarantees, God does draw couples into holiness. But perhaps most important of all is knowing that it is desirable—and easier—to learn such truths before experiencing misfortunes. Those who understand these truths are more likely to *find* God—not to lose their sense of God's presence and love—while undergoing hardships or suffering losses.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

## Sexuality Institute Information

On the Editor's Page in the last two issues of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT an announcement was made regarding The Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, which is being established by the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development. Inquiries about the institute, suggestions pertaining to funding, and financial contributions are most welcome. James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., can be reached by phone at (303) 477-9350 or (203) 241-8041; by FAX at (203) 241-8042; or by mail at Regis University, P.O. Box 11250, Denver, Colorado, 80211-9998, or The Institute of Living, 400 Washington Street, BB4, Hartford, Connecticut, 06106.

# The Role of Intuition in Personal Development

*Patrick J. McDonald, M.S.W.,  
and Claudette McDonald, M.S.W.*

**W**hat is the nature of intuition? How do people (often retrospectively) come to accept and value that pathway to knowledge? To begin this exploration of these questions, we offer three illustrations taken from our experience in practicing psychotherapy.

## ILLUSTRATION 1

For several weeks in therapy, a 30-year-old single woman explored the aftershocks of a collapsed relationship. On the eve of entering treatment she had terminated a two-year relationship with the significant man in her life. The termination came after a series of stormy exchanges related to the man's pathological control over her life. For this woman, what had begun as a well-intentioned effort to nurture and assist someone she loved very much had ended in severe alienation from her family of origin, depletion of her financial resources, and verbal and emotional abuse by her lover.

She was so determined to see the redeeming qualities in this older man that she refused to heed advice from friends and family that he was "using" her. She found personal gratification in stubbornly defending her capacity for loyalty and holding out against the most reasoned warnings her circle of advisers could offer. By the time the relationship collapsed, she was bankrupt—economically, socially, emotionally, morally, and interpersonally.

In spite of her valiant efforts to give this man a life, he walked out on her for another woman.

As she tearfully began to share her experiences, she finally admitted to herself and to the therapist that she intuitively knew from the very beginning that the arrangement would not work. Now she wished she had listened and responded to the messages of her internal voice.

## ILLUSTRATION 2

A 57-year-old priest had struggled with persistent anxiety attacks and unexplainable moods of depression for the entire thirty years of his service to a diocese. Medication, regular supportive help, and a variety of dysfunctional ways of dealing with his anguish brought no relief from his suffering. He finally disciplined himself to examine critically in psychotherapy his long-term life patterns. He disclosed to his therapist that he had been a victim of adolescent sexual abuse by a priest-teacher while he was a student at a local Catholic high school. That abuse was the basis of a series of convoluted, guilt-laden responses, as the abuser told the boy that he showed signs of having a religious vocation. A bright and capable student, he entered studies for the priesthood after high school. His shame, guilt, anxiety, and dissociative rituals had been powerful enough to draw him into, and to hold him in, a life structure he had intuitively never wanted. In ret-

rospect, he admitted, he should never have pursued the priesthood, but he had been too frightened by the specter of sexual and emotional blackmail to do otherwise. The shame and guilt had held him captive for forty-two years.

### ILLUSTRATION 3

A 50-year-old woman entered psychotherapy to explore her recurrent depression, which had been a significant part of her thirty-year marital history. Her husband had been closed, emotionally detached, and domineering throughout their marriage. Now that their three children were established in independent living arrangements, she was ready to explore the origins of her depression. She began to tentatively express her honest opinions to her husband, but his powerful, passive manipulation prompted her to regress to helplessness, desperation, and confusion.

When challenged by her therapist to begin defining herself more clearly as a distinct, individual person, she was lost—unable to visualize herself in any way other than in conformity to her husband's perceptions. She said in utter discouragement one day, "That is the most difficult task I have ever attempted. I have no experience in doing what you are asking, no precedent for it, and I knew when I married him I would probably have to live with a lifetime of suffering, but I was too scared to say no."

### COMMON THREADS PRESENT

What elements do these three scenarios have in common? There are several:

- The individuals in treatment suffered from the emotional and psychological aftermath of a significant and powerful person's control and manipulation.
- The victims colluded in the very manipulation that was so debilitating to them. The collusion occurred because of their reluctance to acknowledge at a conscious level what was happening to them during decisive moments in their developmental histories. Harriet Goldhor Lerner refers to this kind of collusion as "de-selfing," and even though she writes primarily for women, we can apply the term to both sexes. In *The Dance of Anger* Lerner writes, "De-selfing means that too much of one's self (including one's thoughts, wants, beliefs, and ambitions) is 'negotiable' under pressures from the relationship. Even when the person doing the most compromising of self is not aware of it, de-selfing takes its inevitable toll."
- After a long period of time, each individual in treatment reflected on these collusive moments in an identical fashion by stating, "I knew at the time I was getting into something terribly sick,

but I was afraid to say anything." Their fears significantly governed the course of their lives: fear of punishment from a church authority figure, misgivings about the failure of a significant love, and the terror associated with losing a neurotic long-term marriage and having to face life alone.

Using the three illustrations provided, we will examine the nature of intuition. Then we will explore how culturally prescribed roles, socialization, and social pressures disqualify or distort the intuitive experience. We will outline some connections between the denial of intuition and psychological and interpersonal dysfunction. Finally, we will suggest some of the implications of intuition for developmental life and spiritual growth.

### THE NOTION OF INTUITION

A review of the current literature concerning intuition suggests that most authors accept Webster's definition as normative: intuition is a perception or view that encompasses an immediate apprehension of truth or supposed truth in the absence of conscious rational processes. The intuitive person comes to know truth quickly and unambiguously. The literature describes intuition as an illumination, sometimes coming at unexpected moments, bringing a clear, unclouded sense of truth about one's self, one's issues, one's reality.

Women have traditionally expressed greater comfort than men with the experience of intuition but have been reluctant until recently to affirm its value in a feminine journey to the truth. New literature explores the feminist social and cultural context and affirms that women come into maturity by responding openly to the promptings of intuition. To trust their intuition explicitly represents a major psychological shift in life orientation, from giving precedence to external authorities that have previously bound and directed their lives to heeding the authority within themselves. This inward movement is described by Carol Gilligan, author of *In a Different Voice*, as "listening to our inner voices." This shift is not restricted to women of a specific age or socioeconomic group.

### FIVE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, coauthors of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, describe five stages through which women pass in the development of the self, voice, and mind. These stages encapsulate the evolution of the integration of the intuitive experience.

**Stage 1: Silence.** This is the stage of being disconnected from one's own thoughts, voice, and power.

At this stage women believe in external authorities only and lack confidence in their own experiences.

**Stage 2: Received Knowing.** In this stage a woman obtains identity through conforming to others' expectations: she becomes a "good girl," "good student," "good wife." The hold that a person or organization maintains over the "good girl" comes from her identification with the power or her belief in the entity in control of her life ("my husband, right or wrong").

**Stage 3: Subjective Knowing.** The woman in this stage connects with her inner voice for the first time. Perhaps this means she must face the difficult task of turning away from prevailing opinions, engage in conflict with an external authority, or arrive at a truth through personal trials.

**Stage 4: Procedural Knowing.** This is the stage of difficulty and disillusionment, in which a woman's knowledge is deemed either incomplete or inaccurate by some outside authority. In order to challenge that judgment, she uses external reference points in expressing the reasons for her beliefs and actions. This could mean temporary loss of faith in, or contact with, her inner voice.

**Stage 5: Constructed Knowing.** This step marks an attempt to integrate knowledge felt subjectively with what has been learned through others. This is done by thinking inclusively rather than dualistically. The acquisition of knowledge is gained by "letting the inside out and the outside in."

These stages have been articulated by women for women, but we see parallel dynamics in men who struggle to discover deeper truths about themselves. The attraction of being a "good boy" and the rewards of compliance are just as powerful for men as are the equivalents for women. The evolution men undergo in learning to trust their own truth is similar to that experienced by women. We do note, however, a difference in the mode of thinking for men, who have greater difficulty in structuring their thoughts inclusively. Because of their socialization they tend to think more independently, even exclusively (truth is truth, no matter who gets hurt).

Nevertheless, we hypothesize that intuition is an inner voice speaking one's own truth. It is reliable and trustworthy but often ignored, suppressed, or denied due to socialization, social pressures, or prescribed role definitions.

## SOURCES OF DENIAL

The illustrations at the beginning of this article suggest an array of reasons people ignore their inner voices. The 30-year-old woman who had just

lost an intense, highly romantic love relationship had not only been captivated by her lover's charm but had also been seriously committed to bringing her man to life. He had declared early in their history together that no one had ever cared about him the way she did, that no one had ever offered him such love. Even though she knew she was being "conned" in a variety of ways, she allowed him to define the reality of the situation for both of them.

The priest was victimized at an impressionable age by a powerful authority figure. The sexual entanglement, manipulation, and denial were so powerful that he was for all practical purposes unable to register a voice of protest. Shame, guilt, and denial forced the experiences under cover, where they remained for years. After his admission to the seminary, the rewards of privilege, rank, and mobility associated with being a compliant "good boy" supported his illusion of personal well-being until that illusion collapsed in midlife. It was only when his depression and anxiety became too severe to handle that the priest was willing to look at himself.

The woman in the thirty-year marriage was the compliant "good girl" to her husband until her mid-fifties. The collusive contract that shaped her marriage was that she was to be nonconfrontational with her husband in exchange for his defining reality for both of them. Even though she knew early in her marital history that she was betraying herself, the rewards of a comfortable life-style outweighed her misgivings.

## ROLE OF DYSFUNCTION

In all three scenarios the internal stress and manifest dysfunction finally became so severe that they prompted each of the individuals to undertake a major reevaluation of his or her position in a complicated life situation. The illustrations support our belief that the betrayal of one's values, truth, and credibility as a person cannot be sustained for a lengthy period of time without a dysfunctional consequence. It is as if the person intuitively knows that he or she has given away a major portion of his or her integrity for an attractive reward. There is a deep sense that one has betrayed oneself at a fundamental level. The price of this betrayal is high—sieges of anxiety combined with relentless pressings of remorse and guilt—and these feelings can haunt a person for a lifetime. Also, as Lerner writes, "The partner who is doing the most sacrificing of self stores up the most repressed anger and is especially vulnerable to becoming depressed and developing other emotional problems. She (and in some cases he) may end up in a therapist's office, or even in a medical or psychiatric hospital, saying, 'What is wrong with me?' rather than asking, 'What is wrong with

## **When people return to an acceptance of their intuition, they can develop a psychological, emotional, and spiritual wholeness**

this relationship?' Or she may express her anger, but at inappropriate times, over petty issues, in a manner that may invite others simply to ignore her or to view her as irrational or sick."

Serious reevaluation begins when the person realizes that the trade-offs have not been worth making, because they have brought so much anguish. The promised rewards of an earlier stage of development have never been collected, and it has become nightmarishly clear that they will never be claimed. When this realization takes shape, the inner voice surfaces and states, "I should have listened to myself." It is often at this critical moment that the inner voice of intuition is heard for the first time; if fortunate, the person may be able to take the hesitant initial steps toward learning to trust himself or herself. Every subsequent developmental step is made with fear and anxiety, but the person's momentum is sustained by a determination that (as stated in *Women's Ways of Knowing*) "no one is ever going to define my reality for me again."

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

We suggest that the dynamic we refer to as intuition is operative in all persons. In a reflective context such as psychotherapy or spiritual direction, individuals learn to listen for and hear an inner voice that knows what is best for them. When accepted and affirmed, this inner voice moves a person through life in a successful fashion.

We also suggest that relationships and institutional life exact a significant price for their rewards and can at times foster the denial of intuition. As Evelyn Davis illustrates in *Women's Intuition*, fears

of rejection, expulsion, failure, and hurt often cause individuals to deny their deepest intuitions about what is the most appropriate course of action on their own behalf.

Therapists usually interact with those who are the most pained and are ready to explore why they feel so miserable after so much has been promised by a spouse or church authority. By allowing someone else to define their reality for them, they have betrayed themselves. They know at a deep level that they are violating their intuitive awareness, but they are usually not able to comprehend the full implications of this deep betrayal until years later. We suggest that when people return to an acceptance of their original intuition, they can develop a psychological, emotional, and spiritual wholeness. They come to know God genuinely as they come to know their own depths in an intuitive self-embrace. Breaking through denial, self-criticism, fears, and inner alienation is the beginning of an honest relationship with self and God.

Proceeding through the five developmental steps in the evolution of a genuine trust of one's intuition usually takes years of hard work. The developmental process does not occur in sequential, ordered steps; people shift back and forth between defined benchmarks, energized by the changing internal landscape of acceptance and fear.

### **EMBRACING ONE'S INTUITION**

We suggest that the following are some ways of coming to genuinely embrace one's intuitive experience:

*Seeking and appreciating solitude.* It is impossible to hear one's inner voice if one hears only the voices of other persons or the noises of continual entertainment or endless distractions. In *Fire in the Belly* Sam Keen writes, "Solitude begins when a man silences the competing voices of the market, the polis, the home, the mass, and listens to the dictates of his own heart. Self-love requires the same commitment of time and energy as any other relationship. I must take time to be with myself, to discover my desires, my rhythms, my tastes, my gifts, my hopes, my wounds. We need solitude to keep the relationship between me, myself, and I alive and growing."

*Undergoing an honest examination of the patterns in one's life.* The realization that most of one's life has been orchestrated by another person or governed solely by the promised rewards of institutional life can be shattering. For some, this realization offers a catalyst for embarking on a significant period of transition, especially at midlife.

It is our experience that within a supportive context, such as that of psychotherapy or spiritual direction, individuals can often look more deeply into themselves and uncover experiences of success that have their foundation in a genuine but weak

inner voice. These persons are not helpless; rather, it is as if they never learned to listen to themselves. Once they do learn to listen to the voice within, developmental processes start to evolve and strengthen. As success takes shape in small increments, these individuals come to trust their intuition in regard to increasingly significant matters.

*Developing a spirituality.* The realization that a great deal of one's life has been wasted on trying to please someone else can be debilitating. In practical terms, the task of reclaiming a large portion of one's life that was given over to another's control would be impossible. Within the context of honest spiritual growth, however, the awareness of emptiness offers an entry into deeper spirituality. The acceptance of God's love, in which there is no such thing as lost effort, can mark the beginning of a fresh self-acceptance. The determination to seek a more genuine identity and to make life take shape with trust in one's intuition charts a new course for living and opens the way to a more authentic spirituality.

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## Acupuncture's Success Remains a Mystery

Federal funding for research on "alternative therapies" is drawing the attention of increasing numbers of scientists and consumers to the 2,000-year-old Chinese treatment known as acupuncture. The technique, which at times proves helpful in dealing with chronic pain, some neurological disorders, drug addiction, and certain types of nausea, involves sticking small stainless-steel needles into the skin at selected points along the fourteen meridians that Chinese medicine has identified in the body. The Food and Drug Administration estimates that between nine and twelve million acupuncture treatments are now performed each year in this country alone. The *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that a third of 1,539 adults screened had used acupuncture or some other unconventional therapy in 1990. Most chronic problems require four to twenty sessions, with treatments scheduled two or three times per week.

Dr. Bruce Pomeranz, a professor of physiology at the University of Toronto, has been seeking an explanation for the way acupuncture acts to control pain. He has found that piercing the skin can trigger the release of endorphins—natural analgesics found in the brain, pituitary gland, and spinal cord. But how the needle

insertions alleviate other forms of distress, ranging from insomnia to arthritis—including anxiety, depression, symptoms of multiple sclerosis, and migraine headaches—is still a mystery. Dr. Pomeranz says, "There could be all sorts of other things [along with the release of endorphins] happening—a local phenomenon in the skin, an autonomic nervous system reaction, electric field components, reactions in the blood—we just don't know yet."

Numerous studies suggest that acupuncture can benefit 55 to 85 percent of patients with chronic pain. Regulations governing the use of this technique vary from state to state. Some states require that only physicians with special training be allowed to administer this form of treatment; others have established no restrictions. Your state medical board can be consulted for local regulations.

Further information regarding acupuncture can be obtained in the *Harvard Health Letter* (August 1993) and in the books *Beyond Yin and Yang: How Acupuncture Really Works* by George A. Ulett, M.D., Ph.D. (Warren H. Green, 1992), and *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine* by Ted J. Kaptchuck, O.M.D. (Congdon & Weed, 1983).

# Deciding Community Life's Future

*Eileen McNerney, C.S.J.*

**R**ecently, I opened a letter from a young woman whom I have grown to know quite well. Energetic and generous, she is filled with zeal and wholesome piety. She has spent a good bit of time living and sharing ministry with a religious congregation—with the intention, I think, of discerning whether its life-style is a good match for the young, emerging life she feels within herself. Throughout the past year we have shared quite a bit, through conversation and correspondence, about the ups and downs of contemporary religious life in the United States. In the letter I held in my hand, she made the following observations about religious life:

One of the things . . . that concerns me is the interpersonal relationships among the sisters living under one roof. There is a "detachment" I have observed from a distance and up close, and I ask myself if I decided to become a nun would I then be required to do the same? I fully understand that one's focus and sight is set on God and everything and everyone else comes second, so maybe [this is] why the "detachment" (for lack of a better word). I know I'm generalizing to a degree, and I remember hearing that sometimes it can take a long time, perhaps never, for a particular set of religious to build a real community among each other. I would just hope that it would be like sharing a house with several friends who all have various duties and then when an evening comes when other responsibilities don't keep them out till 8 or 9 or

10 they just sit down together and share a good meal and share a part of their faith journey. Maybe that's not a realistic picture.

I just know that I am not the type of person who can live with other people and just scratch the surface of life on a daily basis. Am I explaining myself very well?

You are crystal clear, my friend, and your "generalizing" about a life you have never lived but have closely observed scored a direct hit to my viscera, in a vulnerable place somewhere between my heart and my stomach, where the accuracy of my feelings is verified. In fact, your comment awakened in me some thoughts and feelings about why we religious, while often living closely together, do not always experience the mutuality that community life seems to promise.

I read your comments somewhat painfully and never responded directly to them, but if I had been courageous enough to respond to you with candor, this is how my letter to you might have read:

*Dear Maggie,*

I was delighted to receive your letter and listen again to "the thoughts of your heart." I must admit that your observations about community life made me more than a little uncomfortable. I think it is because you have named a reality that I know quite well and have set apart in some disappointed place deep within me.

I don't want to answer your reflections with a

pious cover-up of what community life is like at its best, and I don't want to share only the dark side and scare you away from a life to which you may feel called. Rather, first, I want to tell you how good a life it has been for me—enlarging, life-enhancing, filled with experiences I might have never chosen for myself, rich with the friendship of both women and men, a direct insertion in the gospel that I felt I was called to and sought, and a constant challenge to grow in the ways of Jesus. I want to share the fullness of what I have been living these past thirty-five years. I want to invite you to throw yourself into this challenging way of living the gospel, if you feel yourself called to do so. But I want to be honest about the place where I think many American religious women find themselves today—particularly in relation to the dynamics of community life. Of course, religious life in America today is the end product of a wide spectrum of experience, and I know only one experience very well. While I can't speak for all religious women in this country, I sense that I may speak for many.

### LONELINESS IS COMMON

What you named in talking about the “detachment” that you have noticed among us is a form of loneliness. Strange that in the midst of life shared with good women on a daily basis, one can feel lonely. Or perhaps not so strange, because my work as a therapist has made me privy to the inner dynamics of several marital relationships. In marriage a similar loneliness can prevail. I have witnessed the pain of loneliness reflected in the lives of men and women who chose each other as life partners, who have experienced hopes and dreams and worries together, who have shared the comfort and goodness of each other's bodies, and whose children give evidence of their union. In the midst of what is apparent intimacy, loneliness can be most intense.

I think that some of the causes of loneliness in marriage and in religious life are amazingly parallel. I also believe that religious life has a unique dynamic of its own. But let me share my own experience with you. I want to name for you four dynamics that I've witnessed in community life—elements that, when neither addressed nor reflected upon, can have the power to rob life of a certain warmth and vitality.

The first one I call “blemish.” Ever played blemish? I know you have, because we human beings are good at it, and yet it prevents us from loving people as they are and keeps us forever disillusioned with the people we live with and work with on a daily basis. Blemish goes like this: ‘If I can find and name and analyze how you are in some way flawed, then I am in some way superior to you. In fact, my superiority—my ability to notice your flaw—gives me a one-up position in relation to you. And how

## The detachment experienced by many in community life is a form of loneliness

can I experience real mutuality with someone who is flawed or in some way inferior to me?’’ I can go through life identifying the flaws in all who surround me, and the more I do it, the more practiced my skills become. It also keeps me distant from others.

It took me many years to catch myself playing blemish and to call a halt to this skill at which I had become practiced. Perhaps when I began to know and claim my own littleness and brokenness as clearly as I claimed my largeness and giftedness, I was able to be more accepting of the littleness and brokenness of my sisters as well. One day it became quite clear to me that there were some pieces of me that were probably never going to satisfy me or others, no matter how much therapy or twelve-step work I did, no matter how many Enneagram workshops I attended or how many learnings I could tease out of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. I have noted that the more I am able to reconcile both the wholeness and brokenness within me, the greater my capacity to accept the wholeness and brokenness of others as well.

Blemish keeps me from loving others warmly and wholeheartedly while I keep waiting for them to perfect themselves (“I'll accept you when you're perfect”). It's a long wait. Blemish is a dynamic that can totally destroy a marriage. I see a lot of blemish played in religious life. In fact, I had become so good at it that if I'm not noticing, I can still slip into it, but it no longer serves to make me feel smart. Now I can call it by its name.

### CONFUSION ABOUT SEXUALITY

A second dynamic that I believe keeps us from fullness of relationship is confusion about sexual-

ity. By this I mean not confusion about one's sexual orientation but confusion about whether one is supposed to be sexual at all. As a young religious I didn't hear a great deal of negative and fearful references to sexuality. Actually, I didn't hear much about sexuality at all when I was new to religious life, and I have heard very little since. The message I gathered was that the vow of chastity somehow made me and others asexual, and it was best that we all stayed that way. The best way to maintain this delicate status was not to talk about it. The only direct message I received had to do with what was called "particular friendship," and it was explained that I could avoid this stumbling block by "liking everyone just the same." A key behavior related to avoiding particular friendships was "not spending unequal time with one friend over another," which tacitly implied not trusting another with confidences, fears, hopes, and dreams.

Thankfully, after the first week of reflecting on this asceticism, I found I was completely incapable of the practice and just went about living my normal life, much as I had noticed most of my elders in religious life doing. It was only years later that my learnings about human sexual development and my own common sense made me aware that my superiors were attempting to protect me and others from entering into lesbian relationships in circumstances where many adolescents and young adults were living closely and intensely together. I think the topic might have been managed more healthily through a clear presentation on human sexuality. I will acknowledge that clarity about human sexual development has been better articulated during the past twenty years, but candid sharing of good information about sexuality among religious women has yet to become a common or widespread practice. I know now that a certain percentage of men and women are created by God with a homosexual orientation. Advances in the study of psychology have verified that anyone—heterosexual or homosexual—may experience strong affective responses to a same-sex friend. Undoubtedly, just as a certain percentage of women are lesbians, a certain percentage of lesbian women will feel themselves called to religious life. It has become quite clear to me that if I am heterosexual, I will not become a lesbian by living with a woman who has a homosexual orientation, nor will her sexual orientation be influenced by my own.

Grappling over the years with what it means to live a fruitful celibate life-style, I have come to know that whatever a person's sexual orientation, she or he had best name and claim it in order to relate warmly and comfortably with others.

Knowing that I am a sexual person allows me to celebrate my wholeness—to be unashamed of the urgings and longing for bondedness that I may often feel. Claiming my sexuality means knowing my deep need for relationship, the need to trust and

count on another, the need to cry safely in front of another, the need to care deeply about another—and to acknowledge that my sisters have like needs. I know that the hole that I sometimes feel in my heart is not a void but a place to carry God and all people, and from that holy place comes energy for ministry. I've learned not to be so afraid of the depth of my relationships with either men or women, remembering that if my life with God is central, sharing myself with another—an experience filled with joys and risks and growth and pain—is not an experience that is unknown to the God who created me. I don't know any other way to be both sexual and celibate.

## ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

I have often wished that we women religious talked more with each other about the experience of celibacy. I think we could draw much strength and support from each other as we grow in understanding of what it means to live as sexual celibates in each changing decade of our lives. Except for having discussed the issue with a very few trusted friends, I've had to learn so much in isolation.

I feel that fear of dealing with conflict keeps us from growing in depth of relationship. Just as in marriage and friendship, our relationships in religious life are only as deep and wide and strong as our ability to experience misunderstanding and hurt, to forgive and to be forgiven. Depth of relationship in marriage, friendship, or religious life can be short-circuited by behaviors such as "walking on eggs" or altering one's behavior to protect the feelings of another from being wounded.

Few of us left our families of origin with a healthy set of skills for dealing with hard feelings in relationships. In some of our families a pattern of alcoholism or addiction or control in one family member governed the emotional responses of the others. "Don't feel," "don't trust," and "don't talk" became the policies that seemed to make the family run more smoothly. Individuals emerging from such a family situation into marriage, friendship, or religious life often don't have a clue as to how to work through a misunderstanding. They experience inordinate fear that if they "rock the boat" by naming their pain, the whole world will collapse. Swallowing pain and collecting resentment toward others are common but unsatisfactory coping mechanisms. It is not an accident that many of us involved in ministry to others refer to ourselves as wounded healers, aware that we must claim our own brokenness even as we reach out to others.

For those in lifelong ministry, the responsibility toward lifelong growth is a serious one. Acknowledging my negative feelings and taking responsibility for them is a way of growing up. I think it took me years to let myself feel my anger and find constructive ways to deal with it. It boggles my

mind to ponder how my unacknowledged anger might have affected a spousal relationship. I did a lot of blaming in my early days, quietly projecting my unexpressed anger onto students, peers, superiors—whatever was in my path.

## DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS ESSENTIAL

I have learned over time that Jesus had much to say about honesty and forgiveness and healing. He spoke frequently of the grace and power of love and evidenced it through the inclusivity of his relationships; he often overlooked notable weaknesses in others and focused on their essential goodness. And he reminded us that we would be challenged to practice this kind of inclusive love again and again. The “intentional” constant in community, when it is lived for the sake of the gospel, is that in every relationship and with every changing circumstance, one is called to practice anew the behaviors of acceptance, apology, forgiveness, self-restraint, and concern for the common good. Sometimes, with a faith-filled heart, I rally to this call; at other times, quite honestly, I tire of this daily challenge.

I think that I would not be alone in acknowledging that one factor that can keep us from working through hard feelings with one another is that in religious life we may live with each other for relatively short periods of time. If I were married, failure to work through the tough issues in my relationship with my spouse could lead to a frustrated ongoing relationship and much unhappiness over the long haul. In religious life I can shy away from facing difficult issues with another because one of us may be moving on within a few months, and the risk of investing the relationship with honesty and depth may therefore not seem worth the pain. The same dynamic is often operative in interpersonal relationships in general. Sometimes I think I would do well to follow the example of my sisters who faithfully follow a twelve-step program, noting how resentments can be destructive to one’s sanity and wholeness and trying to clean up misunderstandings one day at a time. Surely, this is what Jesus was talking about in his many admonitions about humble love. But for myself, I know that I often have to call upon my belief in the words and strength of Jesus to follow this gospel way of life. It can be very tempting to remain superficial, to shake the dust from my feet and move on from time to time. Clearly, this is a very large issue for human beings of every time and culture. Unwillingness to work through misunderstandings, forming armed camps in opposition to one another, and solidifying defensive behaviors have historically caused the greatest pain on both the personal and global levels. Community life can provide a school of the spirit for an effective countercultural way of approaching conflict—it’s just that at times the challenge can seem so tough.

**Community life can provide a school of the spirit for an effective countercultural way of approaching conflict**

## DESTRUCTIVE QUALITIES PRESENT

*Jealousy* and *competition* are words that my hand resists putting into print. Acknowledging that these destructive elements are found among women religious is an uncomfortable admission that would probably be met with denial by many of my own sisters. Nevertheless, I have witnessed the destructive forces of these phenomena among us, although I don’t fully understand the dynamics involved. I see its evidence when an opportunity to affirm another for a contribution or success is met with silence. I see its evidence in the lack of enthusiasm with which we mentor and promote some of our newer members, sometimes leaving them to take the stonier path to growth. I often see it in how we view leadership at the local community level, sometimes preferring to endure a delicate balance of internal chaos among ourselves rather than allow any one person to exert influence, even for a limited amount of time.

I’m certain that this very human behavior has much to do with the level of self-esteem each of us possesses. It’s hard to esteem another aloud or publicly when one’s own belly is on the ground. Yet there is hardly a greater boost that we can offer to the self-esteem of another than affirmation shared with honesty and enthusiasm.

Praise honestly and openly given by one of my sisters means more to me than praise from anyone else. My sisters know religious life and ministry intimately; they know the journey as I do. When one of my sisters gives me an honest compliment, my very soul is bathed with light and warmth. And I have the power to offer her the same gift. I believe that jealousy and competition make us emotional

withholders from each other and account for some of the "detachment" you have observed. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Make my joy complete by your unanimity, possessing the one love, united in spirit and ideals. Never act out of rivalry or conceit; rather, let all parties think humbly of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others' interests rather than to one's own. Your attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil. 2:2-5). It is truly by the grace of God that we are enabled to rise above pettiness for the sake of the gospel.

## NEED FOR EXAMINATION

Certainly, I've shared some of these same thoughts around the fireside with friends as we've philosophized about how we really live and how we'd like to live. From time to time we've speculated on why television seems to dominate our lives, why we sometimes avoid community prayer, and why we allow overinvolvement with work to interfere with time we might regularly share together. I guess I've come to see that television, the overly busy schedules we keep, and other things in which we've immersed ourselves to avoid community presence are symptoms rather than causes of the loneliness and detachment that dwell among us. I want to challenge myself and my sisters to examine more honestly the underlying discomforts that can create dis-ease among us and rob us of our joy—things like blemish, confusion about what it means to be sexual, fear of conflict, and jealousy and competition.

Well, now you know some family secrets. I guess they're not all that bad. And you're a mature woman; you can handle a little reality.

I was in my late teens when I presented myself at the convent door. It didn't take me long to discover that the women with whom I was going to share my life were very human. It took me longer to claim my own humanity. Together, my sisters and I probably demonstrate every idiosyncracy in the book. I love these women. They have taught me

more about God and the world than I could ever have learned by myself. I have been privileged to be part of their glory and part of their struggle. Among these women I have witnessed profound humility, and through them I have been called to a passion for justice. I have seen in my sisters a fidelity to the neighbor in need that equals the strength of a mother's solicitude for a sick child. I have witnessed individuals with the most diverse personalities rally together for the sake of the gospel. I have watched in humble awe as healing and reconciliation were granted and accepted. I have shared the heaviness of my heart in prayer and learned to share the burdens of my sisters as well. I have been bathed in the comfort of laughter and joy and surrounded by great love.

As for community life, I think it is meant to be more than what we've settled for in the 1990s. I believe that in a culture in which action and productivity are valued above contemplation and being, community has the potential for giving us balance. I will affirm that there are many ways of being in community and of relating to one's congregation, and yet as the church and the world begin to uncover the wealth of the intentional group and to set it before us with possibility and hope, I fiercely challenge us to look again at our own model. Community life is shot through with the call of Jesus on a daily basis, and I believe that the grace to live it more courageously is available to us. Those of us who have lived this life and who know it well hold within ourselves the key to its future.



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# Abuse of Children Screams for Response

*Bernard J. Bush, S.J., Ph.D.*

**T**he focusing of attention on the scandal of priests who have abused children may be having the unintended effect of diverting the church's pastoral concerns and resources from a more extensive problem: the pervasiveness of abuse inflicted at or near home—not by church personnel—upon many of the children attending the church's parishes, schools, and other programs. The church is presently putting much effort into the critically important development of sexual misconduct policies, intervention protocols, and sexual abuse awareness programs for clergy, employees, and volunteers. That does not automatically translate into advocacy or protection for the children in our care. Much more still needs to be done if the church is to become truly proactive on behalf of children's safety and rights.

## FULFILLING THE MANDATE

Christians are very aware that they have a compelling mandate, firmly grounded in sacred scripture, to show particular concern for children. Not only do children have a special place of honor in the realm of God; they are also clear icons of God in the world and tell us much about what God is like. We are warned by Jesus that unless we become like them, we cannot enter heaven (Matt. 18:3). To abuse children or to be silent in the face of the present child abuse epidemic is uniquely evil. To

advocate for children is a sacred duty. But apart from a few spotty efforts, some of them very good, the religious community in this country has yet to mobilize itself and become proactive on behalf of children to an extent proportional to the seriousness of the problem and the importance of the divine mandate to protect children.

It has not always been so. Over the centuries, the Catholic church and the religious community in general have often shown extraordinary compassion for children and led all of society in terms of concern and advocacy on behalf of children. The church's past record of establishing orphanages, school systems, and a wide variety of other child-care institutions and programs is a source of justifiable pride. It is not the intention of this article to deny or belittle any efforts or programs that reflect the wonderful works of the church or its dedicated servants. Many of its ministries provide high-quality services, often under severe constraints. In many places members of the church continue heroically to fulfill its mission to reach out to the poor and needy. Catholic Charities, both nationally and internationally, provides services for many children and families in need. However, today's threats to children require the church to launch new initiatives that will be models for society. The Catholic church needs to realize, first of all, that these threats are real and present in the very heart of its own institutions and resolve to address them.

## PERVASIVENESS OF ABUSE

In 1990 the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, after an extensive nationwide study, reported to Congress, the secretary of Health and Human Services, and the nation that "1) each year hundreds of thousands of children are being starved and abandoned, burned and severely beaten, raped and sodomized, berated and belittled; 2) the system the nation has devised to respond to child abuse and neglect is failing." Furthermore, the report stated, "The Board concluded that child abuse and neglect in the United States now represents a national emergency. . . . All Americans should be outraged."

The book *By Silence Betrayed: Sexual Abuse of Children in America* by John Crewdson indicates that according to reliable studies, an estimated 25 to 33 percent of adult women in America and about 17 percent of adult men were sexually abused before the age of 18, usually by someone they knew. When the other forms of abuse are considered (physical and emotional abuse and serious neglect), the percentages are even higher. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the definitions, demographic variables, and reliability of the pertinent studies. In spite of some critics who say that the statistics represent some kind of urban myth or are based on unreliable memories, they continue to be validated by multiple studies and describe a problem of tremendous proportions. There is an almost universal adult defensive tendency to explain away, extenuate, disparage, or distinguish into nonexistence reliable data about the terrible threats to children. Suffice it to say that all forms of sexual and other abuse of children are serious and damaging. The extent of the trauma depends on many factors, but especially on a given child's reactions to what was done to her or him. Treatment specialists need to know these things. The responsibility of the church is to protect children from harm and to get timely help for those who are abused.

A common way to avoid responsibility is to believe that all this is being done to someone else's children. That is not true. All strata of society, including all religious faiths, are represented by the statistics. The church must overcome its resistance to facing the truth that the numbers include children from families in its own parishes, schools, and youth programs.

There are about 2.6 million children in Catholic elementary and secondary schools. There are also about 4 million children in the church's elementary and high school Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) programs. If we apply the sexual abuse statistics to the boys and girls in those programs alone, it can be said with statistical certainty that at least 1.3 million children in Catholic schools and CCD programs today will be sexually abused before

they graduate from high school. Most of them will be molested at or near home by someone they know—usually a parent, sibling, relative, caregiver, or family friend. Again, if the other forms of abuse (physical and emotional abuse and serious neglect) are factored in, the number of abused children is considerably higher.

## FACING THE BIG PICTURE

The great deal of negative publicity given to priests who sexually abuse children and the high-visibility church reaction to it, along with sensationalistic media coverage of related criminal and civil proceedings, give the impression that the principal risk to children within the church is from clergy pedophiles. In the overall picture of the vast problem of child abuse, however, the number of children who will be sexually abused by priests is small. This observation is not intended to minimize the particular malice, betrayal of sacred trust, and damage to the victims that results from clergy sexual abuse of children. It only situates that particular issue within the context of the far greater problem with which the church is faced. The church will never be able to deal effectively with the problem of child abuse by clergy unless it also attends to the broader problem of child abuse in general.

Great confusion surrounds these issues. For example, an archbishop publicly announced the promulgation of a child abuse policy for priests. He then stated that he thereby intended to ensure that no child in the archdiocese would be at risk of sexual abuse. In making that statement, he revealed that he had a very restricted view of child abuse in his archdiocese, because he failed to acknowledge that the hundreds of thousands of children in his pastoral care were still at risk of sexual abuse by someone other than a priest.

Many incest and child-abuse survivors say that they belonged to church-attending families. That image was an important part of the family facade. One woman stated recently that when she was a child, her father, a parish lector, regularly fondled her in the car while driving to mass. She hated going to church and now cannot bring herself to attend because of the terrible associations it has for her. Tragic stories like that are heard all too often by those who counsel victims and survivors.

It is more than likely that that girl and her father never or rarely heard a homily on the evil of incest or any other form of child abuse. Children should hear that such acts against them are morally wrong. Characteristically, abusers tell children that what is happening to them is their fault and that they brought it upon themselves. Children should hear often, from the church, that they are not responsible for any abuse they suffer. Horror stories abound of children who have summoned the

courage to disclose their abuse to a pastor or teacher, only to be reproached for telling such terrible stories about their own parent (or brother, uncle, pastor, family friend, coach). Sometimes victims are revictimized in the process of disclosure and made to feel guilty for speaking the truth.

These realities put a great burden on those who direct church activities dealing with children. One diocesan director of catechetical ministry claimed that if CCD teachers were required to undergo training to recognize physical and behavioral signs of child abuse and expected to take appropriate action (for instance, to report suspected cases of abuse), half of them would quit.

#### CHURCH ADVOCACY INADEQUATE

Child advocates in the public sector regularly report that religious institutions, particularly parochial school systems, are closed to their efforts to share their expertise about child abuse awareness programs. The church's apparent lack of concern and rejection of constructive collaboration causes frustration and disappointment, given that the church would seem to be a natural ally in the protection of children. The church can hardly afford to foster the negative public image that results.

In November 1991 the Catholic Bishops of the United States issued a statement entitled "Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for Our Church, Nation and World." It cited the appalling statistics about the incidence and severity of child abuse in this country and around the world, and it was far-reaching in its recommendations. However, the report did not indicate that the bishops were aware of the seriousness and extent of the problem within the church's own institutions or that they were determined to take steps to attend to it. Instead, the report stated confidently that "our national bishops' conference, state Catholic conferences and other organizations are deeply involved in advocacy for children and families."

As long as that is the belief of the bishops, it will be virtually impossible to make the necessary structural changes that will move the church's institutions to the forefront of the child protection and abuse prevention movement, to be a model for the rest of society. If the church were deeply involved in advocacy for children, it would be in active dialogue with those who are in the field. In actuality, there is practically no representation of the church or its agencies at major national or international child advocacy and abuse prevention conferences.

In August 1992 about 1,800 delegates from over seventy countries gathered in Chicago for the Ninth International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect. It was the first time that that prestigious congress on the international dimensions of child

The church will never be able to deal effectively with the problem of child abuse by clergy unless it also attends to the broader problem of child abuse in general

abuse prevention and advocacy was held in the United States. Yet despite the stature of that conference, there were virtually no representatives of any religious community among the attendees.

With a couple of notable exceptions, the same absence of church participation was evident at the 1991 Denver National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect. That conference was attended by about 2,700 children's advocates, treatment and prevention specialists, and representatives of all levels of government from around the United States.

In 1983 April was designated National Child Abuse Prevention Month by presidential decree. Each year during that month there are many civic and public activities to increase awareness of child abuse and prevention. There is no obvious or well-publicized official church support, either on a diocesan or national level, for the observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month. Child advocates who promote its observance frequently say that churches generally show little or no interest in joining in their efforts. There are some wonderful exceptions, but they are few and far between.

The Children's Defense Fund promotes a Children's Sabbath in October. The organization prepares and distributes to churches thousands of booklets, geared specifically to particular denominations and faiths, describing the meaning of the Children's Sabbath and encouraging its observance. The version designed for distribution to Catholic churches is of exceptional quality and clearly was prepared with the help of knowledgeable Catholics. How extensively that material was used is hard to determine, but it is certain that there was no general hierarchical support advocating its use.

# The sad reality is that the church is neither taking seriously nor applying to itself the proven statistics on the incidence of child abuse

## COOPERATIVE EFFORTS NEEDED

It is disappointing to see that many child advocacy groups and programs do not look to the church as an ally in their efforts. The 1990 report of the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect included a large number of recommendations on how to begin to turn around the national child abuse crisis. It was disappointing that the religious community was barely mentioned and that church names were buried in a list of secular private-sector organizations. The failure to include the churches more prominently in a major call to arms represents a major oversight on the part of the board. But it also says that the churches of this country are not visibly proactive, nor are they among the front-ranking child advocates.

A significant regional conference to coordinate services for children and families was held in Boston in April 1993 and was attended by over three hundred delegates from New England. It was called "Our Families, Our Future: A Multidisciplinary Conference on Family Preservation." The descriptive flyer announced, "This will be a New England conference to promote a multi-disciplinary, culturally-competent, community-based system of care, looking at the child in the context of the family and the family in the context of the community."

The invitation to attend listed twenty-eight categories of interest groups, providers, and social service systems involved with children and families. There was no mention of clergy, pastoral counselors, religious charitable organizations, or religious groups. The conference sponsors later admitted that it had not occurred to any of the

thirty people on the planning committee in any of their meetings to include or extend an invitation to the religious community. It is not surprising, then, that there was no representation of the churches or religious community at that conference. This lack of inclusion in a major conference to coordinate programs for child advocacy and family preservation is just one more sad commentary on the church's public invisibility in this arena. It is also fairly typical. It is hard to reconcile these realities with the bishops' 1991 statement, which claims that "no institution is more deeply involved in serving the needs of children than our community of faith."

The 90th Annual National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) Convention, Exposition, and Religious Education Congress drew 13,000 Catholic educators to New Orleans in April 1993. The participants were offered some four hundred workshops and seminars. Yet in spite of the great numbers of abused children enrolled in our schools and youth programs, the conference featured only one workshop on child abuse, which was attended by about thirty people. In failing to emphasize the problem of child abuse at this large national convention, the NCEA signaled to the world its lack of a sense of urgency about the issue. Moreover, the NCEA failed to acknowledge that the conference was being held during Child Abuse Prevention Month, and in that respect missed an opportunity to tie in with a much larger national observance on behalf of children.

In order to be effective, a program of child abuse awareness and prevention must have the active support and leadership of the ordinary of the diocese. It must be parish-based and include the pastor, school superintendents, teachers, other school personnel, CCD teachers, youth ministers, parents or caregivers, and representatives from child protective service or law enforcement agencies, as well as the children of the parish. In order to be pastorally effective, all participants in the system need to be trained and must work together cooperatively.

It is absolutely essential that child protective services be included in such a program and that a good working relationship be established between them and the school and parish system. While there may be considerable resistance to such cooperation, there is really no alternative. The truth is that child protective services and agencies are the only ones with a legal mandate to investigate allegations of child abuse. Many diocesan child abuse policies that set up investigation protocols independently of law enforcement or child protective service agencies are marginally illegal. They reflect a lack of understanding that an allegation of child abuse is a criminal matter and that the church does not have any mandate to investigate crimes, especially those committed by its own members.

## PUBLIC ROLE OF CHURCH CRITICAL

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an exceptionally important document advocating and legislating children's rights by treaty. For some reason it has not been publicly supported by the American bishops. Their silence is all the more surprising because the Vatican was one of the major drafters of the document and was among its first signatories (with reservations concerning abortion).

In April 1990 Archbishop Renato R. Martino, the permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, stated that "by choosing to be among the first in acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Holy See would like to encourage all countries and peoples to join in assuring legal protection and effective support to the well-being of all the children of the world." He further stated that "the Holy See regards the present convention as a proper and laudable instrument aimed at protecting the rights and interests of children, who are 'that precious treasure given to each generation as a challenge to its wisdom and humanity' (Pope John Paul II, 26 April, 1984)."

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the greatest human rights documents of this century. Over 115 of the world's nations are either signatories or parties to the convention. The United States is one of the few nations in the world that is not. As far as children's rights are concerned, the United States has the embarrassing distinction of being in company with Iraq, Cambodia, South Africa, Libya, and a few other small countries that have not ratified the convention.

The sad reality is that the church is neither taking seriously nor applying to itself the proven statistics on the incidence of child abuse. Major studies and calls to action by both the government and the private sector frequently ignore the church's social services. The church is rarely visible at important child advocacy conferences. It has occasional or no representation in organizations that advocate for children. The NCEA has shown almost no interest in issues of child abuse. The church neglects to join civic observances that promote awareness of the national child abuse emergency. Religious institutions are frequently hostile

to those protective services which have children's well-being as their legal mandate. Finally, the church leadership has not heeded the appeal of the Holy Father to support the UN's outstanding international effort to establish children's rights by treaty.

## BROAD INITIATIVES ESSENTIAL

The church must not let its attention be consumed by the tragic problem of priests who sexually abuse children. There is a vastly larger pattern of abuse in our society which reaches into all our institutions. The church has great resources and the very highest motives to attend to the needs of the children in its care. It no longer can afford to avoid making a serious commitment to becoming the foremost advocate for children in our society. Much knowledge and resources are already available; the time has come for them to be used on behalf of God's children.

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# A Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors

*Janicemarie K. Vinicky, M.A.*

**A**lthough spiritual direction has been practiced worldwide in diverse forms over the centuries, it has recently evolved into the equivalent of professionalization in the Roman Catholic church in the United States. This article provides an affirmative answer to the question, "Is spiritual direction ready for a code of ethics?" I support this view with a statement of societal standards defining a profession; a definition of spiritual direction; a description of the training, duties, and responsibilities of the spiritual director; and recommendations regarding the application of professional standards to the duties and responsibilities of the spiritual director. Additionally, I propose a code of ethics for the practice of spiritual direction in today's Roman Catholic tradition.

## SOCIETAL STANDARDS DEFINE PROFESSIONS

Before it is possible to discuss societal standards defining professions, it is necessary to define the term *profession* itself. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines a profession as "a vocation or occupation requiring advanced training in some liberal art or science, and usually involving mental rather than manual work, as teaching, writing, etc., especially medicine, law, or theology (formerly called the learned professions)." This definition is further elucidated in the law and in the codes of ethics for various professions. Professional ethics, as a gen-

eral rule, seeks to define what the conduct of professionals is or ought to be. The law seeks to protect society from negligent professionals or unqualified practitioners.

Professional ethics differentiates between scholarly and consultative professions. Scholarly professionals are generally described as academic and include college professors and scientific researchers. These academic professionals generally work for an institution or a group and are provided a salary. Consulting professionals, on the other hand, are generally those providing consultation on a fee-for-service basis, and include individuals working in such fields as medicine and law.

According to Michael Bayles, author of *Professional Ethics*, "The professions are characterized by three necessary features—extensive training, a significant intellectual component to practice, and the provision of an important service—as well as three commonly found features—certification, organization of members, and autonomy in work." In the book *Law, Science, and Medicine*, coauthor Judith Areen writes,

When the public is considered too inexpert to be able to evaluate such work, those dominating society may feel that the public needs protection from unqualified or unscrupulous workers. Having been persuaded that one occupation is most qualified by virtue of its formal training and the moral fiber of its members,

the state may exclude all others and give the chosen occupation a legal monopoly that may help bridge the gap between it and laymen, if only by restricting the layman's choice. The outcome is support of the profession by licensure or some other formal device of protecting some workers and excluding others.

Thus, the law and professional ethics assist laypersons in distinguishing among professionals. In addition, they provide direction for professionals in terms of actualizing their commitments to professional standards and professing allegiance to the public they serve. Spiritual direction, as I view it, is becoming the process of professionalization in the Roman Catholic church.

## THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

In her book *Guidelines for Spiritual Direction*, Carolyn Gratton notes that

when a person decides that he or she "needs to talk to someone," or "would like some help," or "should try to find a spiritual director," our society provides an almost overwhelming number of choices, most of which look so much alike on the surface that it may be difficult to distinguish one from another. Moreover, the person himself is not usually completely clear about the real meaning or implications of either the positive or negative life experience that is moving him to seek help. He only knows that talking things over with someone else, getting another point of view, seeing things from a wider perspective or simply "getting things out in the open" in dialogue with another person would be preferable to the isolation and perplexity he is presently experiencing.

Before providing a description of the training and responsibilities of the spiritual director, it is necessary to define the process of spiritual direction. As defined by William Barry and Mary Guy in their article "The Practice of Supervision in Spiritual Direction" (*Review for Religious*, 1978), spiritual direction is an interpersonal situation in which one person (the director) helps another person (the directee) "to become more aware of God's personal communication to him or her, to respond personally to God, and to live the consequences of that relationship." Spiritual direction is usually a one-on-one process in which the director and directee meet on some regular basis (perhaps every four to six weeks) to discuss the directee's relationship with God. Discussions may touch on the life events of the directee that impact upon his or her spiritual development, but the primary focus should always be on the significance of God's presence in those life events and how the directee can learn to better discern the unique voice of God within himself or herself. As George Schemel stated at the 1970 Jesuit Assistancy Seminar on Spirituality, the process of spiritual direction should be one in which the director assists the directee "to

growth in the spirit: in the life of faith (prayer), hope (difficulties, sufferings, trials), and love (the person's life in the Christian Community)."

People voluntarily seek spiritual direction for a variety of reasons. Some laypersons seek it because of a life or faith crisis, because they lack depth in their lives and are seeking greater meaning, or sometimes even because it is in vogue to be a Catholic in spiritual direction. Priests and members of religious orders seek it because having a spiritual direction fulfills a professional standard. Regardless of the reason anyone seeks spiritual direction, it is essential that the spiritual director be skilled and knowledgeable in the art and its practice.

Traditionally, in religious communities, certain persons became spiritual directors almost by chance. They were not formally trained in spiritual direction, nor were they necessarily good at it. Recently, however, because of increasing requests for spiritual direction from both laypersons and religious, training programs have been developed and are continuing to expand.

## SPECIAL TRAINING NEEDED

According to Kevin Culligan, author of a chapter in Barry Estadt's book *Pastoral Counseling*, ministers who provide spiritual direction ought to have special preparation for this ministry. The first area of preparation he specifies is that of personal experience; the student director must cultivate God in his or her life and must be able to hear God in the experience of others. The second area of preparation is that of academic knowledge, especially in the theology of grace, the philosophy of knowledge, sacred scripture, psychology, and psychotherapy. Also, the spiritual director must acquire skills in facilitating a helping relationship.

Some academic institutions conferring degrees in spirituality (usually at the master's level) prepare graduates—most often, members of religious communities—for spiritual direction. Also, over the past two decades, several centers for training spiritual directors have developed. Duquesne University's Institute of Formative Spirituality provides training for spiritual directors, performs research in spiritual direction, and publishes a professional journal on formative spirituality.

The Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and many other Jesuit centers (including those in Wernersville, Pennsylvania; Milford, Ohio; and Detroit, Michigan) have developed training programs for spiritual directors, ranging from nine months to two years in duration. These programs include a significant didactic component, designed to provide the student of spiritual direction with a cognitive understanding of the meaning of spiritual direction in the context of today's church. They also provide prac-

tical supervised experience in spiritual direction and require each trainee to experience the process of spiritual direction while becoming a director. In its brochure entitled "Internship Program for Spiritual Directors," the Cleveland (Ohio) Catholic Diocese enumerates prerequisites that are common to most of these programs. Trainees must have

1) a regular prayer life, 2) reverence for the ministry of spiritual direction, 3) an awareness of being called to this ministry, 4) current understanding of the church in contemporary society, 5) overall familiarity with basic Christian theological tenets, 6) basic communication skills, especially in the art of listening, and 7) a willingness to participate in additional class/workshop experiences which may be needed in various areas of theology, psychology, scriptures, etc.

Although program lengths vary because some programs are more part-time than others, their overall curricula are similar. Program lengths may also vary on the basis of a student's previous education in spirituality and/or experience as a spiritual director. Thus, a significant body of specific knowledge and training has been deemed essential to the competent practice of spiritual direction, and the duties and responsibilities of the spiritual director are consistently described by programs educating directors.

## BECOMING A PROFESSION

According to the criteria outlined by Michael Bayles, spiritual direction qualifies as a profession—specifically, a consulting profession. It involves the three necessary elements he describes: "extensive training, a significant intellectual component to practice, and the provision of an important service." It could be argued that the service of spiritual direction is not as essential to human development as are medical and psychological services. Yet one could quite validly refute that argument on the grounds that the spiritual dimension of the human being is as integral to personal development as are the physiological and psychological dimensions.

The three commonly found features of professions also described by Bayles—namely, certification, organization of members, and autonomy in work—also characterize spiritual direction, at least in principle. Although not all educational programs in spiritual direction offer certification for practice, the fact that they consist of relatively uniform educational experiences indicates a movement toward certification. Spiritual directors have formed at least one professional organization, the National Federation of Spiritual Directors, which has subdivided into eastern and western conferences. This organization meets at least annually and collects dues from its members, who communicate with each other about their profession

through the federation's publication. Members meet to discuss their professional roles and to continue their education in spiritual direction.

Autonomy in work is another criterion common to the consulting professions. Spiritual directors are certainly autonomous agents in the provision of spiritual direction. At present spiritual directors may choose any number of philosophies for direction, and they may choose to provide either individual or group direction or both. Some spiritual directors charge a nominal fee for their consulting services.

Generally speaking, spiritual directors meet with their directees on a one-on-one basis. In most religious communities priests, sisters, and brothers may choose their spiritual directors. However, early in some formation programs, spiritual directors may be assigned to directees. In such cases, after a specified time period, the directees have the option of changing directors.

## DIRECTION STYLES DIFFER

The styles and philosophies of spiritual directors may vary widely, even within a single formation program. In interviews with three spiritual directors (priests) with diverse backgrounds, I found that each provided a distinctly different type of direction to seminarians in the same formation program. Diversity seemed helpful to most seminarians, but some became confused. One director subscribed rigidly to spiritual exercises, requiring directees to pray at specific times each day and to practice a specific method of prayer. He assigned readings to the directees and strongly suggested that they maintain a prayerful posture. This director also encouraged seminarians to discuss problems with their schoolwork and any other personal or social issues during each spiritual direction session. Each session ended with a prescribed prayer (e.g., the Lord's Prayer) for assistance with the issues discussed.

Another director in the same formation program utilized a nondirective, client-centered approach. This director had significant experience in spiritual direction and was quite comfortable with his intuitive sense about his directees. He used no specified prayers. His primary concern was to foster a trusting relationship between the director and directee—a bond he considered to be a crucial cog in the developmental wheel of spiritual direction. He felt that once the director-directee relationship moved to an affective level of communication, so too could the directee's relationship with God. He also believed that modeling was essential to effective spiritual direction. He felt that if the director could articulate and model an effective relatedness to God (preferably through shared experiences in spiritual direction), he or she was a more effective spiritual director. His barometer of effectiveness

## The styles and philosophies of spiritual directors may vary widely, even within a single formation program

was his referral system. It was his impression that those involved in spiritual direction are called to that special ministry. If directees are not growing in their relationship with God through the process of spiritual direction, he maintained, they are likely to seek another spiritual director. Thus, if a director finds himself or herself without directees, he or she should either stop trying to be a director or seek help through continuing education and/or supervision.

The third priest I interviewed had just joined the formation program after having provided spiritual direction as a parish priest for fifteen years. He was completing his master's degree in spirituality and had taken several courses in spiritual direction. He had a rather loose definition of spiritual direction, ranging from talks with parish youth groups and Sunday homilies to directed retreats. He also had difficulty maintaining a focus on spiritual direction in his one-on-one sessions, claiming that spiritual life was directly related to "real" life. He alternated between spiritual direction and pastoral counseling in his sessions with parishioners and claimed to be unable to separate the two. He even described a situation in which he had allowed a codependent client to "use" spiritual direction to "pull her through." He claimed to have known exactly when that client was ready to move out of codependency, not having given her any room for choice herself. He perceived no limits on his ability as a spiritual director to deal with psychological issues. He firmly believed that his directees ought not to become his "real friends"; if a friendship were to develop, he would advise the directee to seek out another director.

The descriptions of the techniques, philosophies, and styles of these three spiritual directors illustrate the autonomy of the spiritual director in the director/directee relationship (autonomy being an essential element in the provision of services by a

professional). The director is free to choose to seek the supervision of other directors if he or she feels the need for support or guidance in the practice of spiritual direction. The director is also free to pursue direction without peer interaction or supervision.

### TIME FOR A CODE

It is my opinion that it would be beneficial for spiritual directors to consider developing a code of professional behavior. Such a code would assist persons seeking spiritual direction to understand the professional responsibilities and boundaries of spiritual directors. It would also provide a framework for self-regulation of the profession of spiritual direction. It is possible, although not likely, that a person paying for spiritual guidance could find himself or herself in an interaction with a director that is a poor substitute for seriously needed psychological counseling. It is also possible, but not probable, that persons providing spiritual direction, although well-intentioned, could be providing some form of psychotherapy without having the appropriate training or education. Issues such as transference, countertransference, and resistance may all be operative in the process of spiritual direction, and a lack of understanding of these issues may be harmful to the director or the directee. Just as knowledge in a specific area does not automatically qualify a person to become a teacher, an affective experiential faith relationship with God does not automatically qualify an individual to provide spiritual direction.

Professional ethics requires consulting professionals to articulate their duties and responsibilities to their clients and to make those duties and responsibilities known to the public. Our legal system requires professionals to self-regulate, thereby protecting the lay public from charlatans. My opinion, which is consistent with that of Carolyn Gratton in *Guidelines on Spiritual Direction*, is that the potential for unethical conduct in spiritual direction exists, and it may be greater than the potential for unethical conduct in psychological counseling. As Gratton puts it,

There is [a] sense . . . in which the relationship between disciple and guru can be said to carry more weight than it does in the therapy situation. A therapist, even when his reality is concealed by a positive transference, is still recognized by all but the most dependent clients as a limited bearer of values, a less than perfect fellow human with whom one can at times disagree. The traditional guru, however, is immune from such fallibility. He is expected to "be there" already in terms of the world of spiritual meaning into which the person who comes wants to be introduced, to have all the answers, and to be fully experienced in living within that unfamiliar horizon. The relationship between disciple and guru is characterized by an aura of power and prestige, by the

implication of knowledge and obligation that goes far beyond that borne by the therapist-client relationship.

That being the case, the practice of spiritual direction has reached an evolutionary landmark: it is ready for a code of ethics. The following is my proposal for such a code to govern the profession of spiritual direction in today's Roman Catholic church.

### PROPOSED CODE OF ETHICS

A spiritual director is a person, trained in spiritual direction, who provides spiritual guidance to individuals (directees) or groups. The guidance is focused on the directee's relationship to God. The primary focus of spiritual direction should always be on the significance of God's presence in the life events of the directee and how the directee can better learn to discern the unique voice of God within himself or herself.

- The relationship between the director and directee is a confidential one, except in situations in which the directee becomes a threat to himself/herself and/or others.
- The spiritual director should not impose his or her moral or religious values upon the directee.
- The spiritual director should be knowledgeable about counseling and psychotherapy and should refer a directee who requires either counseling or therapy to a qualified practitioner of the appropriate service.
- The spiritual director should be well aware of his or her limitations in the practice of direction and should refer a directee to another qualified practitioner of direction when the director and/or directee realize that the direction is no longer beneficial to the directee.
- The spiritual director should continue his or her education in the practice of direction and should

regularly seek peer review for self-assessment purposes.

- The spiritual director should not inappropriately probe the directee for information that he or she is reluctant to share.
- The spiritual director should not engage in inappropriate behavior with the directee.
- The spiritual director should never knowingly deceive the directee.
- The spiritual director should be aware of the powerful position he or she may hold in the eyes of the directee and must never misuse that "power."
- The spiritual director should never be complacent about his or her relationship with God or with the directee, and should continually reassess those relationships.

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# Diocesan Priesthood Vocations

*Reverend Monsignor J. Warren Holleran, M.A., S.T.D.*

**F**or the past few decades vocations to religious life among both women and men have been in decline, though now the trend seems to have bottomed out. A number of studies in the literature have been devoted to outlining the complex of factors—historical, cultural, sociological, economic, psychological, spiritual—that underlie this phenomenon. Vocations among men to diocesan priesthood, at least in the United States and other first-world countries, have followed a parallel course. The ranks of diocesan priests in our country have experienced significant depletion during this period, and the numbers of prospective recruits in our diocesan seminaries have likewise diminished. Many seminaries have been phased out, especially at the high-school level, and most of those that remain have a notably smaller enrollment than in the past. Official Latin church policy stands against the widespread ordination to priesthood of married men and remains opposed to the ordination of women, even in cultures in which women and men enjoy ever-more-equal societal roles, professional opportunities, and vocational choices. For the foreseeable future the Latin church will continue to draw most of its priests from the pool of men who can willingly embrace the charism of celibacy along with priesthood. But notwithstanding this self-imposed ecclesiastical restriction, which continues to be widely debated because of the limitation it places on available personnel resources, the picture is far from altogether negative. Seminary

formation programs have been much improved, the quality of many faculties and student bodies is at a high level, and there is a better balance between the segments of seminary programs (academic and pastoral courses, spiritual formation, field experience, and community life). The focus in recruitment and training has necessarily and appropriately shifted from a quantitative to a qualitative emphasis. If fewer students are applying to seminary at present, and if still fewer are being accepted in the screening process for admission, the quality of those actually admitted for training is by no means inferior to that of previous candidates, and there are at least some respects in which it may be clearly superior. I am thinking in particular of the greater maturity often brought to vocational commitment and seminary community by the much higher number of older students in seminary programs today and of the more broadly representative ethnic and cultural mix in student and faculty populations.

In this article I would like to offer a reflective response, based on some thirty years of experience on different seminary faculties, to the following set of questions:

- What brings men today to seminary and diocesan priesthood?
- What is attracting larger numbers of second-career students to study for diocesan priesthood, and how do they fare?

- What factors lead to perseverance in vocation and ministry?
- What leads men to withdraw from diocesan priesthood in favor of other ways of life?

## ELEMENTS OF VOCATION

What is bringing men to seminary and diocesan priesthood today? My experience of candidates entering and continuing in seminary convinces me that the single most important factor leading men to study for diocesan priesthood today is a deep sense of call, which may have both personal and community origins. Some respond to this call early in life, enter seminary, and persevere to ordination. Some try seminary when they are younger, drop out at some point for a few years or many, and later return to complete seminary training. Others resist the idea of a call felt early in life because they see themselves as either not fully ready or not fully willing, but the idea persists, and after finding other forms of life and work not wholly satisfactory, these men experience a readiness and willingness to answer the call they have always felt to be present. Still others come to recognize themselves as called only later in life, perhaps through the urging of laypeople in a parish community in which they have lived or served, or through contact with a vocation recruitment program or an effective vocation director, or through the potent suggestion of an admired priest, religious, or friend, or through some deeply personal religious experience. Individual patterns of call and response vary, but the most important factor in all cases remains the sense of call, perceived as stemming somehow at once from God, the people of the church, and the deepest reaches of the inner self. Indeed, the perception that the individual's own deepest and most authentic desires are in tune with, and responsive to, the purposes of God and the needs of the larger church community is essential to the pursuit of vocation. Beyond this individual response to the inner promptings of the Spirit and the recognition of community needs, seminarians seem to be influenced by a wide variety of motives leading to the choice of the diocesan priesthood over other ways of life. The principal motives I have observed most frequently in interviewing candidates over the past several years may be classified under six basic themes: service, faith, spirituality, identity, mission, and community.

**Service.** Candidates find themselves attracted to diocesan priesthood as a life of significant service to others. Often this attraction is the concrete expression of a candidate's deep-seated desire to emulate an admired priest or religious he has encountered. The candidate not only wants to imitate individuals he has known in his own past; he also wants to be fully associated with a group of

The single most important factor leading men to study for diocesan priesthood today is a deep sense of call, which may have both personal and community origins

men who, as priests of his own diocese, are actively engaged in full-scale pastoral ministry to the needs of others. The sense of partnership in ministry—not only with other priests but with laypeople and religious as well—is an important component of current vocational awareness. The candidate wants to belong to a group whose dedication and functions he shares, from whom he can learn, by whom he can feel himself supported, and with whom he can take responsibility for the tasks and decisions of ministry. Candidates today seem to possess a heightened appreciation of the diversity of ministries in the church and, at the same time, a recognition of the value of the specific role and function of priestly ministers. They tend to see themselves as called, in collaboration with others in a wide variety of ministries, to work together to form and nurture Christian communities of faith, love, and service.

**Faith.** What seems to distinguish candidates for priesthood or priests with whom I am familiar from other service-oriented people is the dimension within which they conceive their service to be exercised—namely, the dimension of faith. Candidates manifest a clear preference for working with people in the faith dimension of their lives rather than in other dimensions that they might consider less meaningful or less all-embracing. In a surprisingly large number of cases, candidates for the vocation are motivated expressly by the impulse to share with others in a full-time ministerial capacity what they have found deepest and most valued in their own lives. Sometimes this impulse is the result of compelling personal religious experience; sometimes it is the product of the frustration of living out some other way of life that gave few or limited

possibilities for sharing the dimensions of faith life with others or for effecting social and institutional change through conversion to gospel values at deep levels of individual and communal life.

Once the life and experience of faith have become central and fundamental, candidates experience a real longing to share in the most significant way possible—and not only with believers but also with those who may not yet believe—the gift of faith and meaning they themselves have received. They see the call to priestly ministry as an opportunity to provide leadership and direction in communities of faith, and to assist in the Christian formation of others by witnessing in faith for justice and peace, love, and service in our society. It is precisely in this context that they come to recognize the crucial significance, for Christian and human life, of their own future priestly ministry of gospel proclamation, eucharistic and sacramental celebration, reconciliation, community leadership, and pastoral service.

**Spirituality.** Candidates today are men in search of a spirituality they find reflected in the diocesan priesthood. They see it as a spirituality of pastoral service, rooted in prayer and intimacy with God, knowledge and love of God's word in the scriptures, meaningful eucharistic and sacramental celebration in community, deep care and concern for people in their individual and social needs, and collaborative ministerial action. They see in the priesthood an exciting opportunity for living and acting as deeply developing spiritual persons.

Spiritual growth and spiritual ministry are the two most frequently recurring themes brought up by candidates in discussions of the priesthood. They express a desire for the kind of spiritual life and growth that is nourished by the specific ways of prayer and ministry characteristic of the diocesan priesthood. For many—especially for older students—the choice of the diocesan priesthood is influenced by a recognition that they feel relatively little personal interest in other ways of living and that the priestly life is the pathway to the spirituality they seek. At the same time the spirituality of monastic or religious life proves less appealing.

Candidates, for the most part, evidence a primary interest in pastoral ministry and have a sense of satisfaction in, and anticipation for, the various forms of pastoral ministry (e.g., parish, hospital, prison, school, or social ministry) in which they are engaged within the seminary program. Though many younger men find that intimacy and sexuality are issues that often take time to resolve, there is on the whole an observable growth in seminarians' appreciation of the role of celibacy and its positive contribution to priestly ministry. This appreciation, along with prayer, study, and pastoral and community experience, becomes an increasingly integral part of most candidates' spirituality.

**Identity.** A significant accompaniment to the process of spiritual maturation is the gradual discovery and anticipation of the mystery of personal identity as a priest in relation to God and others. This appears to take place through a recapitulation of the stages of human growth with respect to vocation. Successful candidates develop a sense of basic trust and certainty, even in the midst of doubt and struggle, that priesthood is what they are called to and what they desire. There is a dawning recognition that their own deepest and most authentic desires for priestly ministry reflect the direction that God and God's people are summoning them to pursue in life. Their call to the priesthood is motivated not by the ideal that it is the best possible way of life they could (and therefore should) pursue, but by the reality that it is what they truly and freely most want to do with their lives. It is my experience that candidates who idealize the priesthood and/or pursue it with the goal of realizing their own idealized selves are ultimately disillusioned and tend not to persevere at either the seminary or the priesthood.

The recognition that it is possible to satisfy one's intimacy needs as a celibate priest is also most important, and the seminarians most likely to persevere now and later are those who find satisfaction and support in the development of genuine affective ties with friends within and outside the seminary community, as well as with the people for whom and with whom they work in their pastoral placements.

Finally, those who persevere are somehow able to recognize and anticipate in ministry the possibilities of generativity and creativity, both for others and for themselves, and are able to derive a sense of human recognition and satisfaction from their own contributions and accomplishments.

**Mission.** Seminarians, in my experience, perceive the attraction to vocation in diocesan priesthood as strongly anchored in a sense of mission. They express an identification, first of all, with the mission of Jesus himself—a clear desire to imitate him through lifelong dedication to the proclamation of the Good News in word and deed. Second, they express an identification with the mission of the church—a sense of personal contribution to its developing vision and mission in our times, and a real attraction to devoting their lives, on a full-time basis, to the church's task of evangelization. Third, they express an identification with the very real needs of people today and a desire to minister to those needs in a truly concerned way—to the point, even more frequently than in the past, of embracing a preferential option for the poor, oppressed, marginalized, and abandoned of our society and the world. What seems to make the diocesan priesthood so attractive to most who choose it is the variety it offers and makes possible within minis-

try. Candidates do not view it as a narrowly specific apostolate but as a broad and inclusive mission.

**Community.** Men training for the diocesan priesthood today are preparing for ministry in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society and church. Commonly, candidates belong to at least two primary formational communities in which they are already experiencing ethnic and cultural diversity. First there is the seminary community, which is typically a microcosm of the larger church in the United States in terms of ethnic and cultural plurality; then there is the parish community, where candidates may spend at least one day a week, and perhaps as much as a full year, doing a resident internship before ordination. In both settings candidates are faced with the challenge and the opportunity to appreciate the diversity of the people they will be working with as priests, to come to grips with values, attitudes, languages, and customs different from their own, and to learn the collaborative skills needed to deal effectively in ministry with such differences. The capacity of candidates to relate and work well in multicultural communities is proving to be an increasingly important factor in the choice of, and perseverance in, the priestly vocation.

## OLDER SEMINARY STUDENTS

What is attracting larger numbers of second-career students to study for the diocesan priesthood, and how do they fare? Older candidates, in ever-increasing numbers, are being attracted to study for the priesthood for the same reasons outlined above. At present, three seminaries in the United States—two in the East and one in the Midwest—are devoted exclusively to the training of second-career candidates for priesthood. But even in other seminaries, which are sensitive to the special requirements of older students and can make the necessary adjustments in their programs, these candidates appear in general to fare as well as their younger counterparts. There are, however, obvious differences that constitute both advantages and disadvantages for them.

Among the advantages that older students bring with them to seminary, and ultimately to ministry, are the following:

- They have a richer life experience as a context in which to understand and appreciate the call and decision for priestly ministry.
- They have broader intellectual, personal, and sometimes pastoral perspectives into which to integrate their seminary studies, spiritual growth, and pastoral experience.
- They often have a better understanding of interpersonal dynamics and relationships; some have even experienced marriage and family life.

- They usually possess a greater share of that wisdom which is born only of a longer and larger experience of life.
- They show a more mature resolution of growth issues still facing younger men—specifically, issues of identity, intimacy, and generativity.
- They have already had the experience of dealing with alternative vocational and career possibilities and hence, more often than not, show greater stability of choice.
- They are often financially independent.
- They sometimes bring with them a background of varied experience in lay ministry, which contributes to their appreciation of the further possibilities opened up by priestly ministry.
- They have often had deep religious experiences that led to the recognition of their vocation.
- They sometimes bring with them a richer educational background for the study of theology and the practice of ministry.
- Their background of previous work experience has often prepared them well for dealing confidently and competently with a large variety of people.

Older students also labor under certain disadvantages, including the following:

- They often experience difficulties in returning to the discipline of academic study after many years out of school.
- They sometimes have difficulty adjusting to some of the communal aspects of seminary living after many years of independent living.
- They sometimes find it difficult to assume the role of a student after having lived their own lives, exercised authority, and made important decisions in their previous careers.
- They are, more often than not, insufficiently prepared in the areas of philosophy and religious studies to begin the study of theology.
- They sometimes experience difficulty in finding and making friends whose depth of experience and emotional maturity match their own.
- They may have to look forward to a limited term of service in ministry if they are already middle-aged or older.

Despite the disadvantages noted, older students bring many advantages to preparation for the priesthood and to priestly ministry. More must be done to ensure that seminaries and seminary programs now and in the future are better adapted to the needs of older students and are better prepared to exploit to the full the often rich backgrounds and experiences they bring with them.

## FORMULA FOR PERSEVERANCE

What factors lead to perseverance in ministry today? What draws men to priesthood to begin

with is most often what keeps them there in the end—namely, the exercise of a ministry of significant service to others, carried out in the dimension of faith, characterized by a particular and developing spirituality, informed by a sense of identity in personal and role relationships, constituting a willing response to a recognized call and mission, and functioning collaboratively and effectively within a multiethnic and multicultural community. These factors do not, however, operate in a vacuum. Rather, they exist in constant tension with a variety of external pastoral responsibilities and demands, as well as with internal personal growth dynamics and needs. And priesthood, though fundamentally the same vocation throughout life, is (like other ways of life) never really the same from one stage of individual growth to another. It is worthwhile to consider some of the issues affecting perseverance in ministry over the long haul.

## CRUCIAL PRIESTHOOD TRANSITIONS

Of the several crucial transitions in the course of ministry for all priests, three are particularly important: the initial transition from seminary to active ministry, the midlife transition, and the final transition to retirement. How successfully these transitions are negotiated or anticipated can determine to a significant extent whether an individual priest will persevere in ministry.

**Initial Transition.** The transition from seminary to active ministry is, of course, the transition for which candidates have been preparing all along and the sole reason for the existence of seminary programs. The difficulties of this radical transition are too often underestimated or ignored. The newly ordained priest leaves a life in a community whose structures and supports have been mainstays of his preparation and development for the past several years, to enter a new situation in which he is expected to develop his own structures and supports in ministering to a strange and highly diversified parish community. He leaves a close-knit circle of friends and acquaintances—many of whom will be scattered abroad so that he will have little or no ongoing contact with them—to begin again the process of developing a circle of intimates in his changed circumstances. He leaves behind him the group of students and staff who have been his chief support group up until now, and he must start looking elsewhere for a support group to sustain him in ministry. He moves from the top position on the totem pole at the seminary to the lowest position in ministry as an inexperienced parish priest, however tactfully and gently his new situation is apprised and dealt with by those around him. After a span of years at the seminary, where the focus has been on him, his growth, and his welfare, he enters a new context in which such

In the course of ministry for all priests, three transitions are particularly important: the initial transition from seminary to active ministry, the midlife transition, and the transition to retirement

considerations are underplayed and the focus is on what he can do for others, not on what they can do for him. He has suddenly ceased being a student whose activities are closely supervised so that he may most fully develop his competencies and skills, and become a professional who is expected to exercise and further develop his competencies and skills on his own. He must prove himself to the people he works with and for in order to gain their acceptance and respect, to demonstrate his ministerial abilities, to create a network of significant interpersonal relationships, and to develop a clientele of people who will trust him with their deepest life issues and concerns. He is faced with the task of bringing his own order out of the apparent chaos of parochial ministry, which makes increasing demands on his time and energy as he becomes more deeply involved in it. In many ways this first transition of ministerial priesthood is at once the most exciting and the most exacting of all. It is a rough and challenging sea to navigate, and the recently ordained priest can hardly manage alone; he needs much understanding, encouragement, assistance, and support. I have worked with a number of priests who have withdrawn from ministry in the early years of priesthood, and I am convinced that it is critical to deal with their needs if they are to be helped to persevere.

**Midlife Transition.** The second major transition for a priest in ministry is the midlife transition. Much attention has been centered in recent decades on the so-called midlife crisis, a transitional stage through which all people pass with differing degrees of struggle and success. It can be a crucial

time for the priest—a time to take stock of his life, his person, and his work thus far, and a time to set directions and goals for the years remaining. It can be a period of painful but healthy growth into an even richer and more fully integrated ministry, or it can be a perilous and risky time for the radical redirection of aims and energies toward an entirely new identity and way of life outside of ministry. Priests often need a great deal of understanding and help to get through this transition successfully, and it is important for priests and their superiors to be aware of all that is involved in this potentially harrowing period.

**Final Transition.** The crisis that many people in our society face at retirement is a topic of serious discussion today. Retirement occasions a crucial transition in the life of the priest in terms of both anticipating the decision and living it out. Although few priests withdraw from the priesthood itself at retirement age, I have observed that the very anticipation of retirement, even years before it is actually imminent, can precipitate a crisis for men who do withdraw from ministry. This has been especially true for priests who have envisioned retirement as the cessation of the only thing they have ever found meaningful in ministry—namely, the work itself. If other factors, such as strong relationships and significant growth experiences, have been missing, the cessation of work seems a lonely and depressing prospect indeed. This is at least a partial spur for some priests, at a fairly late stage of their ministry, to seek companionship through marriage in order to fill the void. Others deal with the problem by arranging in advance for a part-time or lighter full-time ministry to occupy their time and engage their energies in retirement. In any case, serious attention needs to be given to the issue of retirement by helping priests to prepare for it and to live it out in satisfying ways. Priests who are better prepared for retirement and able to look toward it with less anxiety possess additional reassurance in persevering.

## ONGOING PERSEVERANCE FACTORS

Apart from these three crucial transitions, each involving special problems, there are a number of complex personal and vocational factors that continue to influence priests' perseverance at all stages of ministry. The most significant of these factors concern work, growth, relationships, and support.

**Work.** The primary factor related to work is job satisfaction. Like everyone else, a priest must derive satisfaction and fulfillment from the work in which he is engaged if he is to persist in it. Of course, there are as many sources of job satisfaction as there are varieties of ministry and person-

ality within the diocesan priesthood, but a few conditions for satisfaction are generally applicable. First, a priest needs to enjoy not only doing the tasks required in his job but also being the person who does them. A priest's ministry is much more than the sum of his activities; his activities are the embodiment and expression of his personhood. Who he is and what he is like are not obscured behind his role, as behind a mask; his role is a constant revelation of his identity as a person, with all of his unique qualities, gifts, and limitations. It is through the totality of his personhood, as through a sacrament, that the action of God takes place within the activities of his ministry.

Second, the job satisfaction of today's priest demands that he have the ability to work collaboratively and in close conjunction with others. The age of rugged individualism in ministry is, happily, behind us. A priest can no longer entertain the illusion of accomplishing by himself the ministry of priesthood, let alone the ministry of the church. Recognition of the necessary variety of interrelated and interlocking ministries in the church, so evident in the nascent communities of first-century Christianity, has experienced a healthy rebirth in our day. The satisfaction of working as a priest in this new context is, importantly, dependent on developing the mentality and skill for collaborative leadership, participation in decision making and the communal implementation of policies, and broad distribution of ministerial tasks.

Third, despite the proliferation of parallel and collaborative ministries among laypeople and religious in the parishes and institutions where he works, the priest of today has more to be and do than perhaps ever before. The danger of falling victim to burnout—the most commonly noted syndrome in the helping professions—is a very real threat in ministry too; the avoidance of burnout can be a crucial test of survival for many priests.

Finally, job satisfaction requires a continuing growth within and beyond the role a priest plays and the functions he performs, in terms of attaining a sense of personal contribution and an appreciation of the significance of his formation ministry. It is not enough that he do what he does, however well; he must also come to understand the meaning of his role and functions in terms of their formation potential for the people he serves. Basically, this means that the priest must be able to develop and experience the generative and creative possibilities in his ministerial activities and relationships.

**Growth.** The growth from functional to formation ministry in priesthood has as its basis other kinds of continuing growth, on both the personal and professional levels, whose most important elements are the following:

# The quality and depth of a priest's relationships are perhaps the most important factors in the satisfaction he derives from both his work and his growth

- dedication to a healthy life-style incorporating a proper balance of work, prayer, ongoing study, leisure, and exercise;
- a capacity for maintaining and integrating both active and contemplative values in ministry;
- deepening affective development that meets intimacy and generativity needs;
- progressive self-actualization in the context of ministry; and
- taking full advantage of opportunities for self-development and professional growth in the form of regular attendance at continuing education programs, workshops and seminars, revitalized retreat experiences, renewal programs, and periodic sabbatical leaves.

The priest whose personal and professional growth continue to be stimulated and realized in ministry is far more likely to persevere than one for whom this is not the case.

**Relationships.** Obviously, neither personal nor professional growth takes place in a vacuum. The quality and depth of a priest's relationships are perhaps the most important factors in the satisfaction he derives from both his work and his growth. Nothing can substitute for the development of significant affective ties between him and the people with whom and for whom he works. Neither can he do without intimates and close friends among those with whom he shares his life, his experience of ministry, and his opportunities for leisure. If he cannot experience himself as a man both loving and loved, he cannot be happy, and his likelihood of persevering in a context of basically shallow and unfulfilling relationships is seriously impaired.

**Support.** What all this means is that ministry demands a system of personal and emotional supports. A healthy and satisfying work experience, a genuine sense of personal and professional growth, and a network of significant and sustained interpersonal relationships are fundamental to this system. In addition, the priest has a strong need for supportive mentoring, especially in the early years of ministry, when the recently ordained priest is struggling with his first crucial ministerial transition. Beyond that, he has an ongoing need for more intimate forms of support: regular contact with close friends, good spiritual direction, professional counseling when appropriate, and active participation in a formal support group in which life and faith, struggles and decisions can be shared and processed in depth.

There is much discussion today about the ability or inability of the current generation of young adults to make lifelong commitments. Our society is characterized by a mobility that has made multiple careers in adult life the norm rather than the exception. Yet it seems that one of the attractions of the diocesan priesthood is that it offers a diversity of career activities and possibilities within a single calling. Experience and reflection have led me to conclude that lifelong commitment is less a function of individual character than a function of the factors I have identified as contributing to perseverance in ministry. Thus, the reasons for withdrawal from ministry are not so difficult to understand, and at least some of the factors contributing to decline in vocations may be closely allied with them.

## REASONS FOR WITHDRAWAL

The reasons for withdrawal from ministry, like the factors that influence perseverance, concern work, growth, relationships, and support.

**Work.** The experience of working with priests of all ages who have withdrawn from active ministry leads me to list the following work-related factors as significant:

- a lack of job satisfaction, in the sense that the priest derives little or no ongoing personal satisfaction from the tasks he carries out, the relationships he forms, the role he plays, or the person he must be in ministry;
- an absence of positive feedback, leading the priest to feel that he is making no ongoing contribution of value to anyone and rendering him unable to perceive any concrete immediate or long-range results of his efforts;
- a deterioration of the priest's competence or confidence in the face of new theological and pastoral challenges;
- the priest's inability or unwillingness to adjust

and adapt to emergent forms of collaborative ministry;

- a lack of meaning in the priest's work stemming from a lack of depth in his relationships;
- an absence of vision or challenge; and
- workaholism and emotional burnout.

**Growth.** It has already been noted that a priest who finds no stimulus for growth in ministry may have poor prospects for perseverance. I have found the following growth-related factors to be significant in the withdrawal of men from ministry:

- a recognition that the initial vocational choice was false or is no longer valid;
- disillusionment with idealized or actual expectations of life in community or ministry;
- an absence of stimulus to personal and professional growth from life, work, and relationships in ministry;
- unrealized or stunted emotional, intellectual, and creative potential;
- the failure to find offered, or to take advantage of, opportunities for intellectual, spiritual, and emotional self-development and enrichment;
- the failure to establish the necessary balance between the component factors of healthy human growth;
- the deterioration of spiritual life or faith experience;
- unmet intimacy and generativity needs, which come to be seen as more readily actualized in another form of work or in marriage;
- the development of a serious rift between one's personal and role identities;
- emotional or personality disturbances, including irrational fears such as fear of infection (found among neurotics living or working in the same environment);
- feelings of unworthiness and failure;
- superficial complacency with the status of self, community, and church;
- rigidity, intolerance, and lack of flexibility when faced with change and growth.

**Relationships.** As noted earlier, a lack of meaning in work can stem from a lack of depth in relationships. The absence of significant affective ties has a withering effect on personality as well; no one lives happily or productively for long without them. Feelings of isolation and not belonging are the most obvious symptom of this state of affairs. Problems with celibacy are largely problems with affectivity. Many priests who fall in love, withdraw from ministry, and marry are finally discovering the affective ties they found nowhere else before. Poor relationships with, or mistreatment by, superiors or coworkers can also lead to withdrawal from ministry.

**Support.** A priest without significant affective ties is a priest without support. The principal symptoms of his lack of support will be feelings of isolation and not belonging. He may lack the support of confreres because his work and living situation does not supply it. He may have few or no friends, or may have too infrequent contact with those he does have. He may be without any real support group with which to share his life and ministry. He may receive little or no encouragement, recognition, or affirmation from his superiors, his coworkers, or the community of people he serves. Priests without these essential supports often have little motivation to persevere and are at high risk for withdrawal from ministry.

Once again, it is important to emphasize that the inability to sustain a lifelong commitment to priesthood is a function of many complex interacting factors in the life experience of an individual priest; it is not simply a function of a character deficiency or personality disorder.

## FUTURE IS BRIGHT

I hope that the observations offered in this article may prove of some value to those discussing, assessing, and addressing the vocational situation among diocesan priests and candidates for diocesan priesthood now and in the near future.

My own experience of priests and seminarians, both in the region where I work and elsewhere in the country, leads me to be quite positive about the future of vocations to the diocesan priesthood, despite the decline in numbers by comparison with those of previous decades. True, it will be a different kind of ministry in a different kind of society, church, and parish. But it is greatly encouraging to see that more and more laypeople are becoming trained and active in a variety of ministries, dedicated religious women and men are diversifying their apostolates to meet today's needs, swelling ranks of permanent deacons are assuming important responsibilities, and a new generation of diocesan priests—fewer than in the past, older on the average, and drawn from a richer mix of ethnic and cultural backgrounds—will be ministering collaboratively with all these others in the multiethnic and multicultural parishes of tomorrow.



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# A Male's View of Female Spirituality

*William J. O'Malley, S.J.*

**Q**uite honestly, I have about as much right to speak about female spirituality as I have to speak about any aspect of being Hispanic, Japanese, or black. At best I'm a tin horn Tocqueville describing a country he understands only from outside—yet I'm a man who may have read more about female psychology than most and perhaps can help other males understand it a bit. At least the experts out there—women—can correct me where I'm wrong or skewed or shallow. My very mistakes may provide an occasion for correcting others'.

## **DEFINING SPIRITUALITY**

What does spirituality mean? In discussing this question with high-school seniors, I begin with a gimmick: "You don't really see me, do you?" They flash looks that say, "Oh, God, another looney." But as I point out to them, they don't see me; they see only my body. They study my movements, my facial expressions, my words, what seems to tick me off; then they make educated guesses about the me at the root of all these things. As Antoine de Saint Exupéry says, "The essential is always invisible." The me that gives hints through my body, the me that will be gone when I have no brain waves, is as invisible as atoms and God, but it's there: my self, my soul. I nurture that soul through my spirituality.

Let me make what might seem an antiintellectual, or at least antirationalist, statement. Although I can comprehend philosophical differences between soul, conscience, psyche, spirit, character, and ego, I find that when I'm trying to understand real human beings, such distinctions confuse the issue. My soul is myself, who I am, all the unquantifiable aspects of me: honor, justice, love, faith, communion with God. I can't separate in myself the me who feels genuine guilt from the me who is on a lifetime search for the Grail. I can't separate the me who stands in awe of a moonlit mountain from the me who seethes at injustice. Our conception of spirituality is too often restricted to its obvious religious manifestations in prayer and liturgies. But soul, psyche, spirit, conscience, character, and ego are all the same thing: indivisible me. Distinctions between psychology and spirituality blur.

Although some aspects of that me, that spirit, are not directly focused on God, they are all always indirectly focused on God—because even at moments when I don't advert to it, God is "the freshness deep-down things." When I marvel at a moonlit mountain, I inadvertently give praise to the Artist; when I exult in a well-turned phrase, I give tribute to the Mind Behind It All; when I rankle at injustice to my fellow human beings, I defend the Jesus who I believe is within each of them.

# Both men and women get an almost exclusively left-brain education, but women are encouraged to develop their right-brain potential, while men are encouraged to suppress it

Thus, when I use the word *spirituality*, I am talking about that indivisible soul-life in you and me. When I hone the sensitivity of my conscience, I enrich my ability to respond to the beauty of art and nature; when I develop a personally validated self, I give praise to God.

## MALE/FEMALE DIFFERENCES

For reasons I can perceive only as an outsider, I am convinced that whether through nature, nurture, biology, or socialization, a woman's psyche-soul-spirit-conscience is in most cases quite different from a man's. Not better—just different. Understanding the differences can enrich a woman's self-understanding, character, and dealings with God. It can also help men better understand the women they live with and can help a male-dominated church better deal with women—provided the males are willing to drop their preconceptions and listen.

Except for teaching women during summers and one year at two coed universities, I've spent thirty years teaching adolescent boys. When I was on sabbatical six years ago I realized that I knew far too little about female psychology and set out to change that. I was helped enormously by several books, including *In a Different Voice* by Carol Gilligan, *Women's Ways of Knowing* by four female psychologists, and *She*, a brief book by psychiatrist Robert Johnson that explores female psychology through the Greek myth of Psyche.

At the time I also was searching for a novel to help the boys I teach understand the women in their lives, as *A Separate Peace* helps young women

understand emergent adult males. The book I found fits the job perfectly: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, which surely starts with a worst-case female scenario but reaches a triumphant climax when Miss Celie stands up to her brutish husband. He's just told her that she'll go to Memphis over his dead body, and Celie answers, "Your dead body just the welcome mat I need." It's a moment of personal empowerment that makes you want to stand up and shout, "Way to go, Miss Celie!"

The premise of *Women's Ways of Knowing* is that if language and logic are power, then most women are voiceless, since they are at odds with the traditional male model of understanding: that is, establishing truth by objective, dispassionate methods. Instead, as Carol Gilligan concurs, women enhance objective knowledge with intuition, seeing things in an inclusive context, connecting with ideas rather than mastering them in the way most male-dominated graduate schools demand. In general, men are looking to find cast-iron proof; women are looking to understand, to get inside an idea and walk around in it awhile. Carol Gilligan critiqued the work of her own mentor at Harvard University, Lawrence Kohlberg, since nearly all his case studies on the growth of moral awareness involved boys and young men. One little boy he interviewed said that moral dilemmas were "nothing more than math problems, but with people." Alas, many men approach moral judgments with that same dispassionate—and therefore less than fully human—mindset.

At the risk of seeming to oversimplify, men are generally locked into a left-brain, Greek way of knowing: by strict analysis, logic, and definitions. Women are far more open to a right-brain, Hebrew way of knowing: by inclusion, intuition, and symbols. We can't get along without left-brain definitions, but very often cookie-cutter definitions leave out a lot of important stuff. The usual Thomistic definition of *human*, for instance, is "rational animal," which makes us no more than apes with computers implanted; it leaves out the soul, which is precisely what separates us from apes and all other beasts. My dictionary defines the word *love* in forty lines of fine print that seem to describe the interactions of computer-implanted apes. I contend that a mud-caked kid with a fistful of droopy dandelions defines love a lot better.

I would far rather confess my sins to a woman than to a man. Both men and women get an almost exclusively left-brain education, but women are encouraged to develop their right-brain potential, while men are encouraged to suppress it to avoid being womanish or sissy. Thus, I would expect a woman to at least seem more open to seeing my problems in the context of all the other pressures of my life rather than judging them on a rigid left-brain scale (as advocated in all the antihuman moral theology courses I ever took). When I confess the shaming things I've done, I certainly want to

tell someone smart, but I also want to tell someone with a heart warmer than flint, whether that person is male or female.

## TEACHING THE DIFFERENCES

That difference between males and females—perhaps rooted in objective nature but certainly rooted in nurture—convinces me that at least in the last two years of high school, boys and girls should have at least one course in which they study the assets and liabilities of the two sexual psychologies. I do my best to make my macho male students understand that unless they resolutely open themselves to the “feminine” side of themselves (what Jung called the anima), they will end up half-witted chauvinist pigs. On the back wall of my classroom is a picture of a shirtless young stud with his naked baby on his knees. The two are staring at each other in awe. When boys ask why I display that picture so prominently, I say, “You figure it out.” We tell them too much.

But I would also hope that in girls’ schools and in coed schools, young women would be empowered, too; that intelligent, empathic older women would give them a voice, show them that by not standing up to be counted they are as impoverished as men who are afraid to feel any emotion but anger.

## STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Lawrence Kohlberg, working mostly with males, isolated six separate stages of moral development and applied them to female as well as to male moral motivation: first fear, then hope of reward, then loyalty to a small group, then loyalty to larger groups such as church or nation, then beyond conventional morality to concern for the whole human family, and finally to individual integrity. You can see how left-brain-dominated those stages are, dealing clearly and cleanly with objective reality.

## A VOICELESS PASSIVITY

In contrast, *Women’s Ways of Knowing* sees the lowest level of moral stance for females as silence and passivity, as exhibited by Miss Celie at the outset of *The Color Purple*. She is almost literally voiceless, able to communicate her inner self only through letters to God. For her, blind obedience is essential to keeping out of trouble; asking for clarification is too embarrassing; trying to know why is impossible. Like a child, such a defeated woman swings wildly between the polarities of despair and bliss, rarely experiencing the latter. In order to develop inner speech—to understand the self—a person, male or female, needs external conversation and validation. Teachers can see strong differences between students who are encouraged to speak

out at home and those who are expected to be “seen and not heard.”

## RECEIVED KNOWLEDGE

In the second stage of female moral development, which the authors of *Women’s Ways* call the stage of received knowledge, a woman’s motivation to understand overcomes her fear of sanctions when someone at least seems to have confidence in her, makes what she thinks seem important. This is what the character Shug Avery does for Miss Celie in *The Color Purple*.

Alas, this is the highest stage most women are “allowed” to attain in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Except for the Samaritan woman who brings villagers to Jesus, women are blessed to sit at Jesus’ feet, as Mary did; to grieve with him on the way to Calvary; to give witness to the crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb. According to Saint Paul (no feminist hero), women are to learn from men; they are not to speak in public (1 Cor. 14:33–36); and they are to be modest and subordinate (Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18). Peter (in 1 Pet. 3:1–6) enjoins women to be as submissive to husbands as slaves are to masters—yet the Bible consistently trumpets Yahweh’s overweening concern for the oppressed.

Think of the empowering moment in Henry James’s *Washington Square* when Catherine Sloper, the dowdy spinster who thinks she’s finally found a man who truly loves her, answers her dying father’s comment, “I can’t have you squandering my money, my dear,” with “You’ll never know, will you?” He rasps, “You can be very cruel, can’t you?” She answers, “I ought to be. I was taught by a master.” Another moment to cheer.

But women at this impoverished level equate knowing with receiving, retaining, and returning; they equate an authority’s word with learning—just as most students do, just as *The New Universal Catechism* does when it equates faith not with a reasoned risk but with obedience. Such women (and men) tend to think that anything in print or on television must be true, even when it’s contradictory to other things they also know are true. If there is conflict, they go with the majority. Many good women at this level, like so many remarkable grade-school teachers and mothers, strengthen their self-esteem by empowering others. But a true sense of self can’t come from outside; it can come only from inner self-esteem. Such women define themselves by their role in the lives of others, so that when their husbands die and their children marry, they have no self left.

## SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

The authors of *Women’s Ways of Knowing* refer to the third stage of female moral development as

that of subjective knowledge—the heeding of an inner voice or of a gut feeling about what is tolerable and what is intolerable. In *The Color Purple* you can see that the character Sofia has reached this stage. She is a woman who stands up to men, even to the point of beating up a policeman. She refuses to be passive; she wasn't taught that she had inalienable rights, but she had a gut realization that she does. One woman interviewed by the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing* said, "Every person has her own unique body of knowledge that's been given to them through their life's experiences. And realizing that mine is as valid as the next person's, whether or not that person has gone through six or seven years of college, I feel that my knowledge is as important and real and valuable as theirs is."

This subjective knowledge usually arises at a time of choice between a woman's own good and the good of others. Carol Gilligan studied numerous cases of women who had had abortions and found that almost without exception, each woman mourned her lost baby for a full nine months, after which she either took up her own selfhood and said, "No one is ever going to do that to me again," or slipped further and further into silent despair. At least to me, it makes eminently good sense to include the self as an equal claimant in any dilemma, as Miss Celie does when she finally says, "Your dead body just the welcome mat I need."

## SEPARATE PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE

Separate procedural knowledge is cited as the fourth stage of female moral development in *Women's Ways of Knowing*. In this stage a woman seeks the kind of knowing that most males content themselves with, achieved through the scientific method, in which the observer scrupulously keeps herself out of the equation. She learns how to "fight like the guys" in debate, constructing impersonal structures of justice, discussing not so much to share with others as to determine who's got the "wrong" ideas or who is not "politically correct." At this stage, at which some very intelligent women (and men) stop progressing, a woman has lost a great deal of touch with her major asset: the empathic right brain, which may not give her a debating edge but surely makes her a more understanding human being.

Let me tell a story about myself that may shed light on what the four authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, all female psychologists, mean by separate procedural knowledge, but that may also sound pretty dismissive coming from a man. After listening to a lecture on women in scripture by a female biblical scholar, I said I had given a talk myself to a mixed group, and talked about why I would prefer a female confessor to a male confessor. Later two women approached me and said that

my remarks had been "so sexist." I asked them if they'd heard what I'd said. They answered that I had used the word *bitch* to mean complain. I asked, "If I had said, 'She hounded him out of the room,' would that have been sexist?" They just walked away. The biblical scholar was irate when I told her about this exchange; so were many women seated near me. One woman turned, nodding to the woman next to her, and said, "I can call her 'broad.' You can't." And I said, rather helplessly, "I could if we were friends."

In his Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius of Loyola begins by laying down a "presupposition": Any Christian, he says, ought to put the best possible interpretation on whatever another says. In my fallible judgment, the women who criticized me were in what *Women's Ways of Knowing* calls the separate procedural knowledge stage: they were scrupulously accurate but without empathy. I think during our exchange my empathic, "feminine" anima was more active than theirs. But that could be mere self-justification.

I agree with Camille Paglia that a great deal of militant feminist rhetoric has "descended into dogma. Feminism," she says, "from the start closed itself against free thought. My idea is that every human question remains open and needs constant discussion, new evidence. But young women today—the boldest young women—are being funneled into these feminist-theory courses where they're forced to read this crap, okay?... Because it's contemporary. Because it's politically correct. It's embarrassing to anyone who is a rigorously trained person."

## CONNECTED PROCEDURAL KNOWING

The fifth stage of female moral development, according to *Women's Ways of Knowing*, is connected procedural knowing. At this stage a woman, having developed her "masculine" left-brain potential (separate procedural knowing), becomes reconnected with her major asset: empathy not only with the subject but also with her fellow searchers. (Robert Bly has shown that similarly, a man has to undergo a seeming "regression" from his judgmental, "masculine" side and assimilate his anima, but he also must go back again and keep in touch with his own inner Wildman.) At this stage a woman—and a well-rounded man, like Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*—not only has developed intellectual acuity but also has found procedures by which to access other people's ways of seeing things ("to get inside someone else's skin and walk around in it awhile," as Atticus tells Scout).

What *Women's Ways of Knowing* calls separate procedural knowing (the fourth stage) starts with having doubts, with smelling rats; the fifth stage, connected procedural knowing, starts with believing in the other, suspending judgment until you've

walked together awhile. At the fourth stage of separate procedural knowing, the careful woman researcher tries to subtract the self from the perception. At the fifth stage of connected procedural knowing, the woman realizes that the perceiver adds to the perception, just as the little kid with the dandelions adds to the forty dictionary lines defining love.

Consider the difference between the “typical” father’s and “typical” mother’s response to the news that their daughter is pregnant. Or consider what any teacher will know: boys usually jump right in with objections before they even know what you are trying to say. Adult males perform the same way. Deborah Tannen, in her book *You Just Don’t Understand*, says that in open forums, men talk twice as long and twice as often as women—another manifestation of men’s tendency to want to dominate and women’s desire to understand before passing judgment.

## CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE

The final stage of female moral development described in *Women’s Ways* is that of constructed knowledge, in which a woman tries to integrate all the voices she has discovered along the way. Passivity has evolved into forebearance—patience with both the question and the fellow questioners. The inner voice of the second stage and the received knowledge of the third are critiqued now by the sharply honed left brain. The woman now realizes, with perfect peace, that the mental constructions we use to understand the world and ourselves are always simpler than the complex realities. Unlike dogmatic institutions, she is content with a high degree of probability; she does not require certitude. She realizes that empathy and compassion do not detract from understanding and are essential to a well-rounded view of life as well as a well-rounded self. She knows that passion can enliven even the most abstract thinking, whereas most other self-styled learners merely pursue a cold knowledge to which they are otherwise completely indifferent.

You find this kind of exhilarating female mind in such writers as H. F. M. Prescott, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, not to mention George Eliot, Sigrid Undset, and Willa Cather.

## ROLE OF THE CHURCH

What does the church need to give women so they can enrich themselves as human souls? A voice. Of course, each woman has to have the courage to use her voice. Too many women—and too many men—say, even to themselves in the quiet of their own souls, “I’m nobody special”—a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you truly believe that you’re just one more unprofitable servant, you will

become precisely that: of no profit to anybody, and surely of no profit to an enterprise of what Jesus always referred to as apostolic pilgrims on their way to a Kingdom. You may not feel that you are much of a somebody, but despite what you believe are your shortcomings, Christ has made you a peeress of the Realm; thus, noblesse oblige applies.

For her own good and for the church’s good, no woman with a healthy Christian soul-life can be merely the passive doormat of the first stage described earlier. Nor can she content herself with the unquestioning acceptance that characterizes women at the second stage. She needs not only to feel but also to listen to that intuitive gut voice of the third step: “I am not *just* a woman. I’ve got a right to be heard *and* listened to.” Women who have reached the fourth stage have a justifiable sense of empowerment, but it is painful for those of us who fully embrace that empowerment when they become stuck at that stage, haggling over pronouns when there’s so much to be done, unable to move on to the fifth stage and regain possession of their empathy with their fallible fellow searchers.

If I am correct in my view that no power of the soul is separate from another, then I believe that in finding a voice within the church a woman may well acquire a new, more adult voice in dealing with God; rather than yield wordlessly, she will challenge God with as much vigor as Job did. Rather than yield to “the church says” or “the Bible says,” she will roll up her mental shirtsleeves and dig in to find the truth for herself.

## IN QUEST OF A VOICE

In her book *The Dance of the Spirit: The Seven Steps of Women’s Spirituality*, Maria Harris suggests five steps to a woman’s full possession of her soul: awakening to her self, discovering who that self really is, creating a life that embodies that self, consciously dwelling within that self, and nurturing it to further depth and breadth.

**Awakening.** Meister Eckhart wrote, “This is spirituality: just waking up!” A woman needs simply to call a halt—to draw back from the dusting and dishes, from the clients and patients and kids—and ask, “Hey, what am I doing?” All the things most women do for others are wonderful, beautiful gifts. But as Miss Celie discovered, a woman can’t leave her self out of the assessment of her goodness and purposefulness.

Homilists too often equate repentance with making lists of peccadilloes to dump off at confession as if to save our souls from some future hell, rather than saving them from atrophy here and now. To repent is to undertake a fundamental conversion—to stop, turn around, and proceed in the opposite direction.

Listen to Jesse Jackson: "I am *somebody!*" And to the aging transvestite in the play *La Cage aux Folles*: "I am what I am, and what I am needs no excuses." And to Helen Reddy: "I am woman, hear me roar." So many women (and men) believe that pride is a sinful arrogance, an attitude that one can get along without anybody, even without God. Yet without a sense of pride and self-reliance, a woman becomes a silent slave, like Miss Celie.

When Barbara Walters asked Bette Midler where she thought she ranked on the infamous scale of 1 through 10, Midler said, "Me? I'm a 40!" A self-possessed woman isn't going to be enslaved to anorexia or bulimia, to dyes and goos and wrinkle tucks, to the condescending sneers of the size-six models in *Vogue*. "A first, and perhaps surprising, time to practice this receptivity, this hospitality toward ourselves," Maria Harris writes, "is whenever we get our period. . . . Bleeding is a blessing. It is not, as too many of us were told and found ourselves believing, a curse." And Paglia agrees: "Women *know* they're women, because they have their period. They don't have to *prove* they're women. But for a boy to become a man, other men must say that you're a man. So you have to do something to prove your manhood."

When a woman finds her pride, she finds a voice: "Your dead body just the welcome mat I need." From this moment on, she says in effect, I will take no crap—not from my husband, not from my kids, not from the pastor, not from the checkout girl, and by God, not from myself.

**Discovering.** The second step is discovering who that unique woman is. Granted, every woman (and man) has been wounded by others from the very beginning. This is the time to take each wound and turn it into a weapon—not a vindictive lash with which to get back at loveless parents or eons of patriarchal exploitation or the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. The woman who has taken possession of herself will assess her unique assets and liabilities and turn them to some better use than vengeance or sniffing out political incorrectness. There are too many others out there suffering.

**Creating.** This third step entails turning the self outward, questioning, resisting unquestionable dogma (from whatever source), and empowering others—women, men, children—to shuck off the rat-race mentality and begin to change the world, if only a little.

**Inhabiting.** The fourth step—although it is essential from the very beginning of the process—is for a

woman to inhabit her self in serenity, to be at home within herself. Every woman needs at least a half-hour a day to "be fallow." Whenever I hear mothers' confessions, it's almost axiomatic that they confess to losing their tempers with their children. I give them the following penance: Every day, just before the kids come home from school, make a cup of tea, kick off your shoes, and entertain God in your "home"—that is, in your self. No mother has ever refused that penance. A woman at home within herself can never be dispossessed or deserted.

**Nurturing.** "Oh, I have no time to read." "I can't go to those women's groups; there's just too much to do when I come home from work." Nope. There are very few women whose days and minds are so cluttered that they haven't the time to take a shower. Showering takes no act of will, simply because the need to do it is unquestioned. So ought to be the need to nurture a woman's soul. The soul is what a woman serves with, what animates her loving hands and voice.

Every human being—woman or man—goes around only once. Jesus did not come so that we would settle for merely living in the sense of surviving; he came that we "may have life, and have it more abundantly." Surely it's more important for a woman to find a self, a confident voice ("Me? I'm a 40!") than to fabricate a face, a body, an image.

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# A Transforming Midlife Sabbatical

*Charles W. Schraub, C.Ss.R., M.S.W.*

**P**oet Robert Bly, a spiritual leader of the mythopoetic men's movement, has said that every man needs a "year of lethargy" at about the time of his 45th birthday. When I decided to take a sabbatical from religious life, I knew nothing of Bly's theories about the midlife period, but in retrospect I can see that my inner wisdom was guiding me well.

When I requested a sabbatical, it was difficult to articulate the importance of my request to my religious community. Besides needing rest from a hectic pace and time for quiet study and prayer, I felt compelled to reassess the powerlessness I felt in my commitment to religious life. The burdensome specters of lifelong celibacy, the common life, and religious obedience weighed heavily. The pervasive disillusionment that dogged me was heightened every time I attended a convocation or a chapter of our region of the congregation, even though I felt a deep affection for the men of my community.

That disillusionment extended to the priesthood as well; I grew weary of witnessing the clericalism that seems to seep into every corner of the church's life. Although presiding at Eucharist and preaching never became wearisome tasks, I experienced low-grade depression as I went about my daily tasks as a minister, as well as guilt over my part in clerical oppression.

The most important reason for a midlife sabbatical, however, was the feeling that I was losing myself while doing the work of the church and congregation. Perhaps a better way to put it is that I had not continued to find my true self as a working

member of the community. My boundaries were blurry. Belonging had become confused with merging. Where did the congregation end and I begin? I had been measuring myself entirely by whether or not what I was doing was good for the community and the mission. I wasn't sure who I was or what was good for me anymore, and my confusion resulted in periodic outbursts of anger. In Jungian terms, the individuation process, whose goal is expanding consciousness and wholeness, seemed to have been interrupted. In his book *Marriage: Dead or Alive*, Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig writes that

individuation . . . can also be understood as a drive . . . as essential a part of human motivation as hunger, thirst, aggression, sexuality, and pressures toward finding relaxation and attaining happiness. . . . the individual soul . . . has its roots in the collective soul but [it] must . . . differentiate itself from this and develop itself individually. The drive to individuation impels us to make contact with an inner spark of divinity.

Murray Bowen, the preeminent Family Systems theorist, speaks of the phenomenon of "emotional fusion"—that is, a blurring of psychological boundaries between self and others. This stuck-togetherness develops as a configuration in the family of origin, probably as the result of decades of intergenerational patterns. The result is people who lose themselves in relationships. They are either constantly reacting in conflict to each other or moving together as though fused, with no autonomous emotional identity.

## PATTERNS BLOCK DEVELOPMENT

Fusion clearly impedes the individuation process. While things may appear harmonious in the family, individuals are never in real possession of themselves. It is one thing to give oneself over to a personal relationship, a cause, one's work, or an institution, and quite another to blur one's entire identity. Intergenerational family-of-origin patterns are transferred to, or reenacted in, the nuclear family or, in the case of religious, the community. All of us carry the unresolved conflicts of our families into our future relationships. The beautiful patchwork that is religious life, with its many different family motifs, often causes gridlock—not only in relationships within the community but also in the development and functioning of its mission.

Dissatisfaction often develops in midlife as religious become aware of the pattern they are living out as individuals and as a community—one that stymies growth to full human potential. While not all religious are fully aware of the pattern and its ramifications, most are at least vaguely aware that something is not quite right within themselves and in their relationship with the community. Religious who begin to understand the self-destructive nature of their way of living often make awkward attempts to change the way they relate to the community. These well-intentioned but bumbling efforts can create great tension within the community, which expects things to remain predictable and controlled. Attempts at change can also give rise to power struggles between individuals or factions within the community.

This sort of behavior is a far cry from that which Virginia Satir, in her book *Peoplemaking*, observes in nurturing families: aliveness, honesty, genuineness, and love. The members of nurturing families are considerate and listening; they openly show affection, as well as disapproval and pain. They can talk about anything: disappointments, hurts, fears, angers, criticisms, joys, achievements. Nurturing families plan, but they also adjust as plans change.

## COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES CHAOS

Religious in midlife need nurturance, perhaps more than they ever have before. If community leadership demonstrates openness to several religious taking seriously the call to deep personal and spiritual change, a type of chaos ensues in the community as a whole. Adjustments need to be made in assignments and community plans. Questions on the part of community members concerning the individual's status and finances need to be dealt with patiently, openly, and directly. Communities that are generous and receptive to this temporary chaos are well on the road to renewal.

Time well spent away from the community can

effect a marvelous transformation by permitting the individual to examine and reshape the way he relates to the "family," although physical distance in itself is no antidote to emotional fusion. Still, distance can mean real change if it includes spiritual direction and/or therapy, good friends, stimulating books, a course or two, the development of skills to enhance personal growth, and an abundance of reflective time.

## MOVING TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

Murray Bowen sees the goal of therapy as self-differentiation (as opposed to fusion). Simply put, a self-differentiated person has an autonomous identity—that is, knows his or her thoughts and feelings and can own them separately. He or she is not governed by the thoughts and feelings of others and need not react to others with excessive emotion. A self-differentiated person is in relationship with others but separate from them and can live his or her own life openly and without fear or apology.

Jung's understanding of individuation and Bowen's conception of self-differentiation are related. Without differentiation, individuation cannot happen. A person following the natural drive to individuation does not remain fused to other persons, works, or institutions. He or she develops an "I" that is not independent but interdependent, an "I" that can articulate its own values and life goals separate from those of others.

In the light of Bowen's belief that people tend to choose spouses who are at the same level of differentiation as themselves, what can be said about a religious community's candidates? A familiar lament is that religious life seems to attract dependent, rigid people who lack self-initiating capability, seek security, and are less than fully individuated. Could it be that some religious communities have not been open to the differentiation process through which many of their members yet need to journey?

If midlife transitional crises are not suppressed, they can be a wonderful opportunity for greater individuation through self-differentiation. Attempted suppression doesn't work anyway. At some point, in some way, the crisis will play itself out. When doors are closed against normal responses to midlife crisis, the individual will respond in other ways—sometimes neurotic or even pathological.

Intuitively, many religious know they don't want to end up sleepwalking through the rest of their lives, whether they remain in religious life or not. People of integrity will make the choices necessary to become more authentic, integrated, and self-aware. They won't allow fear or community pressure to hold them back. Once one embarks consciously on the road to individuation, simply praying through the crisis is not enough.

Every system strives for self-regulation. It con-

stantly absorbs change in such a way that the system itself is not thrown out of balance. Systemic homeostasis is a self-protective state that provides a modicum of comfort and efficiency for the system's members. Certainly, there is merit in members not acting precipitously or in such a manner that would, in the long term, adversely affect their community's well-being.

However, in a system functioning poorly, homeostasis becomes a preoccupation. Change is viewed with suspicion. In a religious community this attitude is reflected in such phrases as "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" and "Our community doesn't do that." In clerical religious orders especially, it's "What will the bishops say?" Community life can be marked by secretiveness and power brokering, often taking the form of cloakroom bartering and fear of group discernment. A community's attempts to prevent a change in its balance or in the way it views itself can prevent the needed individual differentiation by which the community as a whole can grow to greater health, more openness, and a renewed understanding of itself as a dynamic ecclesial body.

## OBSTACLE TO PROGRESS

A television news program recently reported the moving story of a family that had returned to its native town in Oklahoma, years after having fled during the Dust Bowl days of the Depression. Upon returning, they busied themselves with community involvement and with coming to an understanding of their roots. At one point, under the guidance of old-timers who had never left the home sod, the family removed eight and a half feet of dirt and dust that had buried a community cemetery. Once uncovered, the tombstones revealed the names of people who had loved Oklahoma and died there long ago. These people whose faces had long been forgotten, whose lives and dreams had been buried for decades, could now be a source of hope and inspiration for a new generation.

Religious life admirably continues the arduous task of removing the long years' accumulated dust and debris that we often affectionately refer to as "our tradition" but which often prevents the renewal necessary if the institution as a whole is to prosper. We will never be the prophetic, contemplative, and social-action-oriented institution that the gospel calls us to be if we don't remove the unessential accretions that have functioned as self-protective devices and beneath which are buried the true faces and vision of the founders.

Part of the call to leadership in religious life is to promote stimulating, creative processes that allow the visionaries in a community to stretch their wings and open up new possibilities for living religious life. More important, community leadership can exercise pastoral wisdom by promoting

individuation and differentiation from the "family." Part of the call to followership is to take responsibility for one's own life and to initiate dialogue about the direction one wishes to take.

Individuation is not individualism. The goal of true individuation is to be whole enough that one can authentically commit oneself to the group or, in the case of some, to another way of life or person. Sometimes it is necessary to go away to find one's true self and then generously give it again to someone or something.

Sabbaticals from work and other responsibilities at key transitional periods in life, of whatever type or length is appropriate, can be an invigorating source of renewal and empowerment for a whole community. General systems theorists have shown that families and communities have a unity or wholeness greater than the sum of their parts. A change in one member changes the whole system. Midlife religious are particularly open to life-giving change in their lives.

Sam Keen, in a book he coauthored with Anne Valley-Fox, *Your Mythic Journey*, writes:

Each person is a repository of stories. To the degree that any of us reaches toward autonomy, we must begin a process of sorting through the trash and treasures we have been given, keeping some and rejecting others. . . . We gain personal authority and power in the measure that we . . . discover and create a personal myth that illuminates and informs us.

Midlife can be a time of getting in touch with one's story, a time to treasure that story and love it anew. Spent well, midlife can be a time of personal empowerment during which one writes the myth by which to live the rest of one's life. In the myth will be the nonnegotiables for one's salvation (or individuation) and spiritual well-being, at least as far as the inner eye can see at that time. In the myth will be one's personal truth and, with it, a reservoir of grace for wholeness.

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# A Painful Journey Toward Healing

*Patrice Geppi, S.S.N.D., M.Ed.*

**I**t happened again. This time there was no turning back from the black emptiness. It just wasn't fair. For years I had dodged the monster, hiding in the shadows of early morning dawn, exhausting afternoons, evening shade tinged with hopelessness, and nightmarish sleepless nights. Depression had once more captured my soul.

The pronouncements of a long line of therapists emerged from memories of the past. Some of those therapists had been marginally incompetent; others had offered morsels of insight that I only partially digested into a modicum of understanding and relief. Remembrances of colored spirals of prescribed pills clouded my beleaguered brain—pills that were supposed to bring relief but only compounded my depression by causing a feeling of thick, unfocused paralysis. A constant barrage of negativity weighed heavily on my thought processes, causing symptoms resembling those of retardation: lifelessness, hopelessness, comfortlessness. Still, my pain clamored unremittingly for attention.

## **EXPERIENCE OF TORMENT**

A lost soul was floundering in a morass of guilt and unworthiness, a fog of confusion and isolation. The theme of dread was laced through every vicious moment of every waking hour. There was no surcease, no cool breeze of peace, no remittance from the self-imposed exile of the body as the mind

became imprisoned in its own torment. Who could understand the invader, the alien force, that had reduced me to a shell of my former self? There was no respite from this harsh taskmaster. I was not lost in a sea of delusion or demonic fantasy; the realities of life were fully apparent to me. "Help me, help me" echoed over and over again from the hole in my soul and was whispered to a God who had abandoned me to my unbearable anguish.

No one has adequately explained to me the mystery of depression. Certainly, there are myriad hypotheses about its causes: a chemical imbalance, a hereditary predisposition, a trauma to the cortex of the brain in early development, a hormonal imbalance, a lack of serotonin, an early loss of a love object. Who knows? I claim no expertise, but I maintain that theory runs dry in the face of debilitating pain. I believe that strains of truth run through all the hypotheses mentioned. Perhaps there is no single reason for depression, but a complex system of causes yet to be discovered.

Medicine brought no immediate relief; agonizing weeks and months went by before any perceptible positive change. There were weeks when suicide was a very welcome option, if only to bring an end to the torment. I gathered the horde of green, blue, and orange pills into a mound and wondered how many it would take. The awareness that I might survive a suicide attempt with irreversible brain damage was my only deterrent; I just couldn't bear to risk that possibility. Sometimes I thought it

would be so much easier just to walk in front of a passing car; my death would look accidental, and release would finally come. Yet some force kept me from this annihilation; I had no idea why, but it seemed so pointless.

## SELF-DEFEATING PATTERNS

Was this time any different than the past? Causes and reasons were abundant: a doomed close relationship; a job resignation after belittling treatment from a female boss; a suspicious lump on my neck, signaling cancer; enrollment in a new graduate program in psychology, which caused me to ponder my own arrested development in some areas and thus produced great anxiety; and dealing with a mother who had once again succumbed to major clinical depression after a recent heart attack. All of these problems were, for me, of major crisis proportion, and the fact that I was trying to handle them all at once with virtually no support systems brought my world tumbling down in jagged pieces. It did not take long for me to spiral down to what I knew best: hopelessness, helplessness, being the victim. These were familiar patterns learned over a lifetime, and new input did not seem to change these stumbling blocks. How could I have had a series of bouts with severe depression over the years, and have been treated with psychotherapy and medication, and not emerged into a new space with all the knowledge I needed to lick this thing? I was unable to internalize the psychological accretions of the past to make sense of the present. I was intellectually and academically proficient, and emotionally dwarfed.

## EARLY EMOTIONAL ABANDONMENT

Early on, my mother had been a role model of self-defeating behavior. On the one hand, I clung to that model as if it were a life raft; on the other hand, I loudly denounced my mother's self-destructive way of not coping. Her bequest to me was a legacy of dependency, powerlessness, nonaffirmation, and negativity, which I wore as very effective negative battle gear. I was blind to the possibility of another way, a way that would lead me onto a positive path of growth rather than into the dead-end street of depression, regardless of how many books I read or how many workshops and therapy sessions I attended. I was in limbo, a wounded child whose mother had emotionally abandoned her a lifetime ago, and I seemed doomed to repeat the past.

Naturally, this planted the seed for great emotional neediness, hidden behind a wall of brittle toughness. Betrayed and hurt enough times, I would run to the isolated place I knew best and block out the world. I became the victim and punished myself with recriminations: if only I had

tried harder, done things differently. I blamed and blamed and blamed, mostly blaming myself; the other person or the situation usually came away guiltless, as I had usurped the burden of all guilt.

## INSIGHTS PERMIT PROGRESS

But this time a certain readiness to make progress was there. From the seeds of therapeutic work sown by a significant former therapist, and with the gentle insight of a new one, some windows were opened. I let down the barricade enough to look at the fear, to look compassionately at the wounded inner child and comfort her, to change the old tapes, to deal with the feelings, to write in a journal daily, to go to a self-help group and know my pain, and to lessen my enmeshment with my mother—to let go.

Hot tears traced a path down my cheeks and into my heart. The frozen tundra of emotions began to thaw and melt beneath those tears that had been held in bondage for a lifetime because I had feared that releasing them would cause my defensive wall to crumble. I could not be weak, I had thought, for surely I would disintegrate and be lost in the ocean of abandonment. Now I know that those tears are rivers of salvation—healing me, cleansing me, bathing me in their release. Flow, tears, flow, and wash away the poison in my system so that I may be free at last to bend, not break; to open, not close; to surrender, not imprison.

Some days I feel truly connected and open to the universe. At other times I slide down the dung heap of defeat and disillusion, but I get up more quickly and dust myself off faster, and I am ready to resume the journey once again—a little wiser, saner, more at peace. There are even moments when, for all the suffering that has gone before in this demoralizing disease of depression, I can speak from a grateful heart. This "gift" has brought me incredible pain, but also a new understanding of myself and my personal growth.

Could that understanding have come another way? I don't know. But for me, the hand fits the glove; the disease fits the personality. In following my own path, I came to see the face of God reflected in my own, and I was finally able to begin to reach out and touch another, and to continue the sacred journey to healing.



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# BOOK REVIEWS

*Generous Lives: American Catholic Women Today*, by Jane Redmont. New York, New York: William Morrow & Company, 1992: 381 pp. \$23.00.

Jane Redmont has bitten off an immense topic: What American Catholic women are thinking and what shape their lives are taking. She has come at it not in the sociological way, by adding up the yeses and nos from a random sampling of people, but by artfully selecting for conversation individuals representing the spectrum of ages and subcultures. The chapters provide alternating currents. Redmont summarizes how the group as a whole has responded to each of a series of topics: being an adult believer, community involvement, prayer, feminism, sex and relationship, the church, ministry, the future life. Between these summaries she inserts profiles of individual interviewees—10 in all, out of a total of 110.

*Generous Lives*, as the title itself promises, is a heartening book, perhaps because of its focus on active and productive women. How did Redmont find or choose them? Many of the names were suggested, it seems, through a network of contacts from her divinity studies and campus ministry positions in the Midwest and Northeast. Not many women religious appear, and their voices certainly do not dominate the book, but we do get one exceptional profile—that of Jeannette Normandin of the Sisters of Saint Anne. (Redmont identifies all her speakers, but uses pseudonyms for those who requested anonymity.)

What did Redmont learn about American Catholic women? Is generalization possible? "I found few crises of faith among Catholic women and

much hunger for the life of the spirit. Where there was a crisis, it was a crisis of institutions." Their Catholic heritage is much prized. Many who give it up as young adults come back to it after giving birth, as a treasure to pass on. One of these women valued "the tremendous emphasis on doing what's right and examining one's conscience"; many, of course, found that a very mixed blessing. Karen Doherty, a young executive, says, "The sense of life is what I get from Catholicism . . . and the sense of continuity, the communion with strangers. . . . Catholicism is less intellectual than Protestantism. That sense of the sacred to me is something distinctly Catholic." What the majority recalled of their Catholic childhood was "a blend of shame and guilt, rule and control on the one hand, and mystery, warmth, and security on the other."

Not surprisingly, the women had much to say about prayer. Many have found commuting time to be prayerful. Redmont sums it up thus: "From conversing with God or praying throughout the day, the women slip easily into contemplation, simply being in the presence of God, a gratitude without words." Catholicism, Redmont contends, focuses not on doing but on being, on living a life passed in God's presence. "The Catholic church has fostered in its members," she writes, "the belief that the core of life is contemplation and celebration."

This sense of the sacred is activated by the Eucharist. One woman, identified by the pseudonym Joanne Grace, says, "The liturgy, the Eucharist, the Mass will always be central to my life. . . . The Eucharist is what it's all about." Ellen Reuter, a frequent (and sharp-edged) voice in these pages, says, "I really struggle with why do I stay Catholic, because the Catholic church in so many ways is so abusive of women. . . . But I stay because of the liturgy, because of the Mass, the Eucharist." The health of the local faith community often determines women's loyalty. "Like a growing number of Americans," says Redmont, "they are beginning to choose a living-room sized group as a primary

congregation" without necessarily deserting the parish (although some do).

Holy Communion, in its shared tangibility, forms us as the body of Christ. It gives us our sense of being a community, as various of the women recognized. This was put in poignant terms by one who had come back to her faith in prison, thanks to a sister chaplain: "When it was time for the Sign of Peace, I was like, 'Oh no! Who's here?' because it's such a close community. . . . I really had to forgive an enemy and that's a big growth for me and I'm sure it's a growth for them too."

The Eucharist nourishes the believer—at least the believer who is not put off by the manner of preaching or by the pastoral attitude. As Redmont tells us, "I began to notice the frequency of the language of feeding and nourishment in women's accounts of leaving and staying in the Church." She notes that "pastoral care was one of the most basic forms of nourishment women mentioned," and that "of all the issues that came up in conversations about pastoral care, divorce was by far the most painful and alienating. Like death, it is a wrenching experience, full of desolate grief." According to Redmont, at least half of the divorced women she interviewed had been physically abused.

Ann Richards Anderson, the most pervasive voice in *Generous Lives*, speaks in favor of the allowance of second marriages: "That's one of the things that the Catholic church stands for, that people make mistakes and they grow and change and are forgiven and start over." Redmont is candid about one finding that surprised her: "I did not expect to encounter many positive feelings about Reconciliation, but I did. Women found the gift of God's forgiveness enabled them to live with renewed energy and faith."

## ALUMNAE BECOME FEMINISTS

Redmont reports that while fewer than half the women in *Generous Lives* think of themselves as feminists, "virtually all the women who had attended Catholic women's colleges described themselves as feminists." Those who shy away from feminism are put off by brashness, anti-male attitudes (or, paradoxically, the compulsion to be just like men in everything), or an excessive concern with "me." All the same, Redmont asserts, these women are grateful to the feminist movement for fostering their own assertiveness. She also reflects that the avowed feminists among her interviewees did not seem anti-male at all.

The reservations many women feel about feminism have led a Catholic therapist in Boston to reflect that "for all the women I see, the biggest issues are the lack of self and fear of finding and using personal power"; the latter, in their perception, may well "disconnect you from others, particularly from men." Redmont herself seemed to be

dealing mostly with successful women: "Catholic women's definitions of success—which were remarkably alike—always included one or more of these four goals: using their gifts and talents; using them for the common good; attaining inner peace and a sense of comfort with themselves; and sustaining loving relationships. A great majority of the women said they felt successful."

Kathi Bowers Wallis is the subject of one of Redmont's profiles. She is the one you would not be surprised to see driving a car with a bumper sticker that reads, "I Survived Catholic School," because she didn't quite. She stands, in this book, for the American women whose Catholic life is faint and full of question marks—although when a close friend develops cancer, she goes right to her knees: "I ask God to keep giving her the strength to keep getting through it." And Wallis contributes, from a standpoint of genuinely Catholic realism, to debates about the modern American woman: "I don't think you can have a real high-powered career *and* kids *and* a relationship with your husband *and* all the superness that women are supposed to be able to control. . . . I've seen too many women burn out with it."

Redmont reports that "only a minority of the women were without ambivalence in their attitude to abortion." For many, ambivalence arose from considerations of freedom of conscience or from awareness of situations "so awful," in the words of one, "that I can only believe that the Lord would say it's okay." A pro-life activist has this to say: "You meet a lot of women in the pro-life movement who got there because of the experience they've had of an abortion. It's a never-ending source of pain."

"Liturgy and governance, those two Catholic obsessions, were recurring themes in conversations with Catholic women," Redmont writes—and the second of these was always thorny. The problem seems to be partly cultural. "American inculcation is often at odds with the culture of Rome," she observes. "Freedom of speech, due process, open deliberations, participation in decision-making"—these democratic values were "shared by all the women I met, and they held to them tenaciously." Furthermore, she adds, women feel they "are really the backbone of the church," yet men do all the leading.

During the interviews, Redmont says, when she mentioned the bishops' pastoral letter on women, the response was generally laughter, "in which I heard above all a credibility gap." Not all the women are bothered by hierarchy in the church or exclusively male celebrants or noninclusive language, "but virtually all wondered aloud whether they are viewed as fully adult human beings in their religious family. 'The respect just isn't there.'" Redmont believes that whatever the outcome of the pastoral letter, the process was useful and necessary for the bishops.

One usually reads a book like *Generous Lives* to "listen" and learn (even from the eyebrow-raising parts, like the author's positive assessment of Women-Church). For all readers the book opens doors into debated areas. Obviously, "Sheilaism"—that religious-supermarket impulse (as documented by Robert Bellah) to pick and choose the elements of one's own religion—has affected Catholics.

Women are the chief beneficiaries of *Generous Lives*. In reading this book they have the opportunity not simply to mull it over but also to write themselves into it—to tell themselves, maybe even with pen in hand, where they fit into what is described here by their American Catholic peers, what is true of them and for them.

—James Torrens, S.J.

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*Lights in the Darkness: For Survivors and Healers of Sexual Abuse*, by Ave Clark, O.P. Mineola, New York: Resurrection Press, 1993. 130 pp. \$8.95.

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**S**ister Ave Clark is a remarkable woman—a Dominican sister who has worked for more than twenty years with persons with disabling conditions in the Diocese of Brooklyn. She offers in this book accounts of her own experiences as well as her support to victims of childhood rape and sexual assault and other abuses. Child abuse is, of course, a topic that has gained national attention over the past ten or fifteen years and, more recently, become an agonizing issue for the church.

The book is deep, not in elaborate formulations of theory but in the conviction from which Clark speaks and the help she offers. It is above all a practical volume, meant to encourage those who have suffered abuse to reach out for help, and to provide clear and concrete advice to those attempting to help the abused. The book's offerings range from referral lists and lists of resources (including videotapes) to suggestions on how to pray with someone who is trying to come to grips with a troubled past.

Chapters (all brief) are devoted to family dysfunctions, to coping skills that children develop but that become inadequate or counterproductive in the long run, to survivors of rape, and to survivors of a family suicide. Separate chapters are devoted to survivors who enter religious life and to those clergy or religious who betray their sacred trust in the course of their professional lives. No one in the United States in the nineties needs to be reminded

of this latter group—a group quite small, I believe, but one that has wrought widespread devastation.

No abstract treatise, the book is written in a direct and personal style, from the heart. In the course of the book, Clark lists some comforting and nonthreatening names by which a troubled person can approach God. One of these is "Gentle Star"—a term that could well be applied to the author herself.

It first occurred to me to compare *Lights in the Darkness* to a first-aid manual. It is a manual of first resort, practical and useful, yet it is also more than that. To produce such a work is a considerable achievement. The personal pain and courage from which it springs resound through the pages and are edifying in the root sense of that word. Anyone who reads it will be built up and strengthened in faith, in hope, and in courage.

—Jon J. O'Brien, S.J., D.O.

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*Wrestling with Love: How Men Struggle with Intimacy with Women, Children, Parents, and Each Other*, by Samuel Osherson, Ph.D. New York, New York: Fawcett Columbine (Ballantine Books), 1992. 350 pp. \$20.00.

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**M**en and women: how do we understand ourselves? How do we understand each other? Final answers elude us, yet the questions never fail to fascinate us. Consider, for instance, that Deborah Tannen's hugely successful *You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation* topped best-seller lists for over a year. Books of the "men's movement" tend to gain less attention, although the more flamboyant writings of Robert Bly (*Iron John*) and Sam Keen (*Fire in the Belly*) were also "on the lists" for substantial stretches. *Wrestling with Love* is a thoughtful and worthwhile entry to the field.

Samuel Osherson's newest book "focuses on how the struggle for intimacy is played out in crucial areas of men's lives, as husbands and lovers, fathers and sons, as friends to other men, and in the workplace." Dr. Osherson, a practicing psychotherapist and research psychologist for the Harvard University Health Services, has worked and written extensively in men's studies for some years. In this book he presents his findings in an engrossing and illuminating fashion.

Part I centers on "Fragile Connections": chapters study the roles of shame, anger, and loss in men's lives and the high price these exact as men make unsuccessful attempts to connect with others. Cen-

tral to all of Osherson's professional work is the importance of the father-son connection. His concentration on that relationship and the price that a faulted relationship exacts brings to mind Gloria Emerson's introduction to her fine *Some American Men* (winner of the 1985 National Book Award): "Stuffed as we are with our daily rations of psychoanalysis-publico, it is not a revelation how the harsh father damages the male child. What is not so apparent is how the father who loves his son and makes it known, even in the sorriest circumstances, lifts the child to a privileged order from which he can never be expelled."

The content of *Wrestling with Love* is meaty and presented with clarity, precision, and interest. Osherson cites the myth that men are emotionally remote and uninterested in relationships, that they are autonomy-minded and well-defined. At best this is only partly true, he contends; men are indeed interested in relationships. He sees the central issue among men today as not power or control but powerlessness, an internal disconnectedness from self. When men feel out of control and vulnerable, too often the desire to connect and the impulse to shun intimacy arise at the same time and are the essence of an attachment battle. Intimate moments confront men with devalued and difficult parts of themselves. Feeling exposed and vulnerable, they struggle with shame and too often respond with anger, start a fight, assume a competent or disinterested pose, or flee from the emotional scene.

Part II of the book, "Sturdy Connections," is a series of chapters on men's relationships with women (mothers, wives, bosses, and friends), children (sons and daughters), parents, and other men. A concluding chapter spells out the ideal of the "connected self" pursuing "healthy intimacy."

Osherson writes early in the book that his plan is to present "a sort of road map, identifying key crises and markers of change, as well as pathways toward personal renewal and growth that are manageable and realistic." In my assessment, he has done that task well.

Persons in religious life can use this book to reflect on the ways in which the church can mirror and participate in the love of Our Father, God, for us—and also how we as individuals can respond to the prime analogue of unconditional love, God's love for us.

*Wrestling with Love* should prove an eminently useful book to many laypersons and religious who seek to reflect on their personal and professional lives. And even though formation in recent decades has heavily emphasized communication and interconnectedness, I think the book can reinforce these themes for men in religious communities and for those who would understand them.

—Jon J. O'Brien, S.J., D.O.

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*Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, by Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989. 196 pp. \$8.95.

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here is a deepening realization that spirituality cannot be isolated from cultural change and psychological growth. Spirituality grows out of a need to believe in more about life than meets the eye, and it serves as a source of hope for responsible living. In 1968 the Latin American bishops at Medellín, Colombia, pointed out that an evaluation of popular religion must include in its frame of reference the subcultures of rural and marginal groups as well as those of the middle and upper classes. In this book the authors offer a fresh perspective for exploring the rich tradition of Mary of Nazareth in the lives of marginalized people.

"Believers turn to Mary through art, music, architecture," they write, "and in pilgrimages as a refuge in adversity.... any view of the religious dimension of human existence must take account not only of... ideological components [of]... institutional dogma, but also of the experience that springs from the depths of human beings who reach out for something to hold onto, beyond the frightful and menacing limits of their history."

The place of the feminine has recently become a focus in Catholic thought and practice. Contemporary concerns of theological importance include feminine images of God, inclusive language, and the role of women in ministry. The Semitic influence in the Bible resulted in a view of the person as a unified totality of body, mind, and spirit. Later, some schools of theology were influenced by Neoplatonic thought patterns that conceived of matter as evil, viewed the body with suspicion, and perceived a dualistic separation between body and spirit, masculine and feminine. The authors make provocative observations about these issues of human development and holistic spirituality.

One traditional method of studying theology is to begin with defined doctrines bolstered with scriptural proofs. This book takes as a starting point for theological development the quest for meaning by oppressed people who cling to their belief in God despite dehumanizing life situations. The theological method proposed is based on a movement from a male-centered to a human-centered anthropology, from a dualistic to a unifying anthropology, from an idealistic to a realistic anthropology. The Latin American experience is one prism for reflection on the social, economic, and cultural contexts of oppression and suffering. To move beyond a

passive acceptance of exploitation as "God's will," people must somehow be summoned to make the quantum leap of acting against whatever treats them as things rather than as persons.

The authors examine the privileges of Mary, reflected in traditional Catholic theology and liturgy in this context. "The mystery of Jesus' incarnation in Mary's flesh," they write, "teaches us that the human person is not split into a body of matter and imperfection, and a spirit of greatness and transcendence. Rather it is just in the frailty, poverty and limits of human flesh that the ineffable greatness of the Spirit can be experienced and adored."

They also present challenging reflections relative to casual attitudes toward sexuality: "[Mary's] virginity draws us back to the beginnings of the world.... God forms out of clay a covenant-partner... male and female.... The human creature is like virgin unexplored land where anything can happen.... In her pregnant virginity, Mary is what humankind is called to be... temple, dwelling place, open and available." In this fascinating theological reflection, the authors move beyond a biological orientation; they see Mary's virginity as a

symbol of humankind's poverty in achieving salvation without the grace of God. They lead an inquiry into the terms "Immaculate Conception" and "Assumption," which illustrate the glory of God manifested in creation, as well as the belief in the resurrection of the body. Mary is presented as the one in whom God's grace has full play—creation come to fulfillment.

A revitalized theology of Mary is overdue. This work, written by women theologians, represents a significant beginning. Ivone Gabara is a professor at the Theological Institute of Recife, Brazil, and Maria Bingemer is a professor of systematic theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. They succeed in overcoming the limitations that stifled the past theology of Mary: male-centeredness, dualism, and idealism. They relocate Mary to the earth, among the people to whom she belongs. Shining through this translation from the Portuguese is the conviction that the mystery of Mary speaks a word about the world "where men and women are born, grow, love, suffer, live, clash, rejoice and die."

—Reverend John M. Ballweg

## Caution Needed in Using Aspirin Preventively

**T**oo many healthy people may be using aspirin in the hope of preventing a heart attack. "One of our concerns is that the publicity surrounding aspirin has led many people to take it on their own," says John E. Willard, M.D., an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Referring to a major report on aspirin and heart disease that appeared last year in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Willard explained, "In our article we try to point out that there are benefits and risks with aspirin, as with other medicines, and it's impossible for an individual to weigh them adequately without consulting a physician." The benefits of taking the widely used drug on a long-term basis, research has shown, include possible prevention of heart attacks in healthy men and women without any major diseases—especially if they are over age 50 and smoke, are overweight, or have other risk factors, such as hypertension (high blood pressure), elevated serum cholesterol, or a family history of heart disease. For persons fitting this description, aspirin appears to cut heart attack risk by about one-third.

On the other hand, the risks of using aspirin to prevent heart attacks include hemorrhagic stroke, gastrointestinal bleeding, stomach pain, heartburn, and

nausea. A small number of people are allergic to aspirin. For them, other preventive drugs (such as Persantine) may be helpful, although the value of such agents has not yet been established by clinical trials, and they are considerably more expensive.

According to the *Harvard Health Letter*, published by Harvard Medical School, studies of patients with "stable angina" (i.e., cardiac chest pain that is provoked by exercise and relieved by medication or rest) showed that these people were much less likely to suffer heart attacks if they took a standard 325-milligram tablet daily or every other day. However, the aspirin had no effect on the frequency or severity of chest pain, despite the fact that it reduced the likelihood of heart attack by as much as 87 percent.

"What most people with no risk factors for heart disease really care about, of course, is whether taking an aspirin every day or two can keep them from having a heart attack in the first place," observes the *Harvard Health Letter*. The answer is maybe. Dr. Willard says that for some persons the risks of routine aspirin use may outweigh the benefits, so "people should never begin taking aspirin on a regular basis unless they've discussed this with a physician who knows their medical history."